

Cutting a New Path: VT Barbering at LSCI Allenwood

Clippers in hand, purpose in heart - reshaping lives one cut at a time.



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(BOP) - The Low Security Correctional Institution (LSCI) in Allenwood, Pennsylvania, is shaping futures one haircut at a time. With the graduation of its second class of barbering students, the institution is weaving vocational training into a broader legacy of rehabilitation and opportunity.

In October 2022, LSCI Allenwood welcomed its first Barbering Instructor, Floyd Merritt. Within a few months, he successfully certified the VT barbering program through the Pennsylvania State Board of Barber Examiners, launching the inaugural class in April 2023. The one-year program requires participants to complete 1,250 hours of theory and practical training in topics ranging from the history of barbering to general anatomy and physiology, men's and women's styling, chemical treatments, and Pennsylvania's barbering regulations.

Enrollment eligibility is contingent upon meeting educational prerequisites, specifically a high school diploma or GED, as mandated by the state board. Those who complete the program must pass both theoretical and practical exams to earn their Professional Barber License and diploma. The second cohort of barbering students sat for their written exam in early July 2025; eight of the nine students passed and advanced to the hands-on practical test administered on July 28.

Mr. Merritt personally selects each cohort through individualized interviews, identifying the most qualified candidates for the program's ten annual seats. *"Not every inmate is asked the same questions; I tailor the conversation to everyone, he explains. 'This allows me to draw out more authentic, personal responses, based on my own life experiences and perspectives. During my first set of interviews, I found that asking the same set of questions to everyone often led to similar, surface-level answers. I'm looking for depth, honesty, and a willingness to grow.'"*

Inside the classroom, the energy is palpable. The shift from theory to hands-on learning ignites engagement. *"There's excitement, nervousness – even from me. You never know what you'll need to fix or guide them through. But this is where real growth happens,"* Merritt shares. He notices the students tend to be focused and structured when clear expectations are set. He instills discipline by emphasizing accountability: *"You are a direct reflection of me as your instructor."*

Mr. Merritt's number one goal with this program is to help his students grow, both academically and personally. He's building confidence, independence, and purpose. He wants them to feel safe to make mistakes, and learn from them. When students tell him, *"This is the first time I've actually finished something"* or *"I didn't know I was smart until now,"* he takes pride in their transformation. For him, this program is about more than teaching skills – it's providing identity, hope, and a second chance.

Some students are driven by family tradition, having spent their early years sweeping hair in local barbershops, and watching the everyday interactions of the community unfold. As Mr. Merritt shares, *"Some . . . come into the program because of family history—a parent or grandparent who was a barber. These early memories create a deep emotional tie to the craft. For them, barbering is more than a skill, it's a legacy."*

Mr. Merritt envisions his model expanding throughout the Bureau of Prisons, with the ultimate goal of making vocational training in barbering and cosmetology available at every BOP institution. *"[W]hen we teach people how to use their hands to build up—not tear down—we're doing more than just instruction. We're planting seeds for a new life."*