

QVCDC

Ware, MA

Just over a decade ago, Nelson Rivera opened the Sharpest Edge Barber Shop on Main Street in Ware. Rivera, originally from Springfield, believed that his hard work ethic and a family-friendly atmosphere would help shape the Sharpest Edge into a success story. He was right. The barber shop thrived and five years later, Rivera found himself looking for a new location to house his growing business.

Rivera found the right spot, just one street away, and began looking for help with funding in order to make the move. When a local bank turned him down, Rivera went to the Ware Town Hall and talked to someone from the Community Development Department who quickly referred him to the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation. “I hadn’t ever heard of the QVCDC before,” Rivera said. “I didn’t know what to expect.”

According to Rivera, any nervousness he might have felt was quickly assuaged upon meeting with QVCDC Executive Director Sheila Cuddy. “I sat down with her and we talked about what I wanted for my business,” he said. “I gave her the basic information she needed and she went to work.” With Cuddy’s help, Rivera was able to get funding for his mortgage with a local bank.

Rivera faced another road block when his insurance company required that he pay the full insurance premium on the building up front. Financially unable to comply, Rivera turned to the QVCDC again. “They gave me a loan,” he said. “That’s what got me into the building I’m in today.”

The building Rivera purchased was a former bar that had seen better days. It took a little work, and a little technical assistance from the QVCDC, to help him turn an outdated bar into an attractive, family-friendly barber shop.

Five years later, Rivera returned to the QVCDC when he needed to replace the building’s flooring and heating system. The issues with the flooring were largely cosmetic, but the building’s 50-year-old heating system was directly affecting Rivera’s business.

Rivera was burning through 100 gallons of oil every 10 days and the building still wasn't warm. "The boiler wasn't working properly," said Rivera. "There were a few days during that winter when I had to close all together. I was cutting people's hair and it was so cold you could see their breath." Rivera said he tried to tough it out, donning gloves to try to keep his hands warm in between clients, but he soon realized that customers weren't willing to put up with those conditions.

Once he decided he needed to make some changes, Rivera knew where to turn, the QVCDC. "They took such good care of me the first time I decided to make that phone call again," he said.

In addition to a loan to help cover the costs of the upgrades, the QVCDC offered Rivera some technical assistance. The QVCDC's Bryan Nichols visited the barber shop to examine the situation and review some of the cost estimates Rivera had received for the work. In addition to looking at the failed boiler and the ductwork, Nichols pointed out some trees on the neighboring business's property that were hanging over his roof and presenting a potential hazard for his property. Nichols walked Rivera through the process of contacting the neighboring business's manager to get the issue taken care of. Nichols and Rivera also talked about ways Rivera could expand his business revenue in the future and helped him develop action plans for improvements to the building. "I'm excited about the plans I have for this place," said Rivera.

Today The Sharpest Edge has an equally sharp new look and much more comfortable temperatures. "My customers are loving the changes," Rivera said. "I've come a long way and I wouldn't have been able to do it without the QVCDC."