

The CHICAGO TATTOOING COMPANY INC.



Illustrations done by artist Joel Jose Molina

By Dan Muller

Images provided by Chicago Tattooing Co & Christina Lundin

The Chicago Tattooing and Piercing Company holds the distinction of being the oldest tattoo studio in Illinois. Known for its long history, artistic credibility and commitment to safe, high-quality work, the studio has become a trusted name for both first-time clients and longtime collectors.

As a BBB Accredited Business for 25 years, the shop continues to demonstrate its dedication to transparency, professionalism and ethical service—values that have helped it earn the trust of generations of customers.

The Studio That Stayed: A Chicago Tattoo Legacy

Chicago Tattooing and Piercing Company began in the 1960s as Cliff Raven Tattooing, founded by the late Cliff Raven with help from artist Buddy McFall. Together, they shaped the studio into a center of creativity and professionalism during a time when tattooing was still viewed as fringe.

In 1973, the shop was incorporated as Chicago Tattooing and Piercing Company and became a permanent fixture in the city's growing body art scene. The business faced a pivotal moment in the late 1960s, when Illinois raised the legal age for tattoos from 18 to 21 due to health concerns. While

many other studios shuttered or relocated to Wisconsin, Raven and his partners chose to stay in Chicago. They responded by advancing sterilization practices and even designing custom tattoo machines that could be autoclaved—a significant innovation at the time.

Dale Grande first walked into the shop as a customer before joining the team in 1973. "When I got here in '73, it was the only shop in the city," Grande said. "We had an autoclave and were sterilizing all needles. Back then we made our own equipment with single-service colors that got thrown away after each session. We were the forerunners of that."

When Raven left for California in 1976, ownership passed to Grande, who initially ran the studio solo before realizing the need for more artists. Over time, Grande trained and hired a dedicated team, building a multigenerational client base while upholding the studio's commitment to artistry and safety. Though today's industry relies on single-use cartridges and pre-sterilized tools, those early steps in sanitation helped cement the shop's reputation for integrity and care. The studio has always operated along Belmont Avenue in the Lakeview neighborhood, changing addresses over the years but never its dedication to artistry, safety and community.



1017 West Belmont Avenue, Chicago, Illinois



Excellence in Craft and Care

From first tattoos to full sleeves, the artists at Chicago Tattooing and Piercing Company bring technical skill and creative vision to every piece. Clients are encouraged to collaborate with their artist: refining ideas, selecting placements and ensuring that each design feels personal and well-executed.

In addition to tattooing, the shop offers professional piercing services with an emphasis on safety, hygiene and precision. Whether a client is new to body art or adding to an existing collection, the staff provides thoughtful guidance through the entire process, from consultation to aftercare. The studio's commitment to quality continues to shape its approach. Every service is rooted in trust, respect and an unwavering standard of care.

Trusted, Respected, Referred

Chicago Tattooing and Piercing Company has earned its reputation not just through the quality of its work, but through the way it treats people. The studio is known for welcoming clients of all experience levels (from curious first-timers to long-time collectors) and providing a judgment-free space where questions are encouraged and nerves are understood.

"All of our artists make a point to show that customer questions are welcomed because we know nerves can come into play and we want them to feel at ease," Ali G. added.

That level of care continues beyond the chair. Artists assist with everything from design decisions to aftercare and touch-ups, often building long-term relationships with clients who return for future work or refer friends and family. Word-of-mouth has been a major driver of the shop's success, along with a reputation for consistency and integrity.



Dale Grande (top left) with the shop's original sign from 1973. Artists Ali G. and Claudio Rojas with owner Dale Grande (above) by the shop's Mr. Flash Machine art wall. Owner Dale Grande (right), 1976 at the first US Tattoo Convention in Houston, Texas.



The studio is also respected in the larger tattoo community and frequently hosts guest artists from across the country. These high standards, along with its legacy and community trust, are reflected in the studio's BBB Accreditation.

"The BBB Seal is a recognizable symbol that helps people see that our store is cool and also legitimate," adds Ali G.

How to Connect

Whether you're a first-time client or a seasoned collector, Chicago Tattooing and Piercing Company offers a trusted, experienced partner in your body art journey. For more information on Chicago Tattooing and Piercing Company, visit their website at www.chicagotattooing.com and stay updated on the latest designs, guest artists and special events by following them on Instagram at @chicagotattoo.