

Maintaining Service Tradition Is Imperial's Imperative

By Patricia Smith-Deering
Phoenix Managing Editor

When a man starts his own business, one of the things he hopes to do is pass the torch on to his children. "He doesn't know it yet, but that's what he's going to be, just like my father did me." That is the proud prediction of Guary Connelly, Jr., in discussing his plans for Guary III, the third generation to carry on the tradition started by the man who opened his own barber shop in 1958.

Guary, Jr. remembers well the time when his father began the operation of what was then 11th Street Barber Shop, down in the area of East Winston known as "11th Street Bottom." From 5th grade through high school, he worked side-by-side after school with his father, shining shoes for the barber shop's patrons and soaking in the exciting atmosphere that pervaded his father's business. "I loved shining shoes," Guary says. "I liked to make a person's shoes shine so pretty, I could see my face in them. It gave me a real sense of accomplishment." He also enjoyed the financial reward from some of the shop's big tippers, whom he describes as men

sometimes on the other side of the law, who "wore big old hats" and left him \$2 tips for a shoe shine that cost between 25 and 50 cents in those days.

A professional barber since 1976, Guary Jr. was destined to follow in his father's footsteps. His father said so and saw to it. "First, I intended to go into the service, the Marines," he said. But, he went, instead, for two months during the summer following his 11th grade in high school, to barber school. "It was Harris Barber College in High Point, 803 S. Blount Street, right across from Shaw University," he recalls with such accurate and laughing recollection, you could almost hear his father's mandate to him. He graduated "April 3, 1976" and has been in the business ever since.

By the time Guary graduated, the business had been in its second location, 1417 N. Liberty Street, since 1969 and had been renamed Imperial Barber and Beauty Shop. During an interview with the **Phoenix** in February, 1991 - eight months before his death on October 18, Guary, Sr. explained his rationale for the shop's new name.



*"We've got to keep
the shop going. I
can't let it die
now."*

Guary Connelly, Jr.

Guary Connelly, Jr. is carrying on the family tradition and is already grooming his children.

"Imperial means the best, supreme, and royalty, and they all represent Black people."

Upholding the tradition of being the best is Guary, Jr.'s goal, and he is joined by his brother, Michael, and sister, Karen, both licensed cosmetologists - and another sister, Belinda, who manages the inventory for the business. Imperial

has six barbers and five cosmetologists, all licensed, and Guary plans to add three more barbers. There are also two receptionists and two cashiers, according to Guary. He notes among the high-tech upgrades to the business "a new phone system in the shop with an intercom as part of our new

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