

Enterprise

BUSINESS PROFILE

No Generation Gap Here

"The funeral director is that person who orchestrates a kind of environment and atmosphere of support in a kind and gentle way that guides through difficult times," says Jerry Gilmore III of the business in which three generations of his family have participated. Pictured are, top right photograph, the first generation: Frances S. Gilmore and Jerry C. Gilmore Jr., who founded the business; bottom middle photograph, the second generation, back row from left, Jerry C. Gilmore III, Lavon R. Gilmore and Thomie D. Douthit, front row, Jeanette D. Gilmore and Cynthia Douthit; bottom photograph, the third generation, back row from left, Meka Douthit, Jerry Gilmore IV and Monica Gilmore, front row, Meiji Douthit and Donna Gilmore.



Three generations work together

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Chronicle Staff Writer

For most people, the topic of funerals is something that is approached with some apprehension. But for Jerry Gilmore III, the subject presents a welcome opportunity to talk about family tradition, an occupation he loves and three generations of service to the Winston-Salem community.

"If my parents had been in some other skilled profession, I would have learned how to do whatever it was that they did," said Gilmore, the president and general manager of the Gilmore funeral business. "An electrician takes his son in and teaches him the business. It's the same way in this business."

Gilmore represents his family's second generation of funeral home operators and recently his daughter, Donna, became the first member of the family's third generation to become a licensed funeral services director. Her licensing, she said, is something of a dream come true.

"It's something I grew up with," said the 21-year-old business administration student at Winston-Salem State University. "It was something I always wanted to do and I hope now that I will be able to help out around the funeral home."

The younger Gilmore continues a family tradition started more than 39 years ago when her grandparents, Frances and Jerry Gilmore Jr., began their business in a white, five-room building on East Fifth Street. In 1956, the Gilmores undertook their first remodeling project. At that point, the five-room building was redone as a combination business facility and living quarters. The business currently is

housed in a large facility that spans a major portion of the 1600 block of Liberty Street. But despite all of the physical changes made at the establishment, Gilmore said the family remains dedicated to upholding the original goals of the founders, and he said he is ever-mindful of their commitment to the service which they provided.

"My mother was a pioneer of sorts in this business," said Gilmore. "There were no women to speak of in the funeral services business when they were starting up."

The Gilmores' business now boasts four female family members who are licensed funeral services directors. In addition to his mother and his daughter, Gilmore's sister, Cynthia Douthit, is a licensed director. She also is responsible for financial and administrative functions at the funeral home.

In order to pass the North Carolina state licensing exam, applicants must complete 32 hours of college study and a one-year apprenticeship. But the license qualifies a director to do much more than embalm bodies, although Gilmore said embalming is probably the most well-known function of a funeral home.

"While embalming is an integral part of the total service, it is just a part of the whole," he said. "It's like having five fingers. You can do without one little finger but you can't do without all of them. It's important that you have good funeral services."

In addition to the embalming process, Gilmore's provides counseling services for survivors and funeral merchandise and goods. Gilmore said the services are three-tiered and include the embalming

process, the comfort and consultation process and the actual funeral, which he calls the "healing process."

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And, Gilmore said, he loves every minute of his job, although the idea of handling corpses makes the average person somewhat squeamish. But for Gilmore it's just a part of life.

"I've been around it since I was 3 years old," Gilmore said. "I never learned to be afraid. None of my kids has problems with it. It's second nature to me. I love my job. I'm obsessed with the feeling that what I do is a ministry as much as anything else. It's my job to surmount difficulty."

But Gilmore said he still is able to maintain an empathy for situations and for surviving families.

The possibility of contracting communicable diseases, Gilmore said, is not a true threat to him because he is aware of situations and takes necessary precautions. But he does admit to one moment of hesitancy not long after he got involved in the family business.

"One of the more fearful times was when TB (tuberculosis) was out," he said. "I'm not fearful now because I'm careful. I go by the book. I'm serious about what I do and I'm not reckless. If it takes me a little longer to be careful, I'm going to take the time. I'm no more at risk than if I were a welder who had to climb up on a beam or an airplane pilot who has to depend on his instruments."



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Man and Woman of The Year

The *Winston-Salem Chronicle* invites you to help in the selection of our sixth "Man and Woman of the Year" by filling out the nomination form below and returning it to us by mail at P.O. Box 3154, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27102 or in person to the *Chronicle* offices at 617 N. Liberty St.

Recipients will be chosen by the *Chronicle* staff and advisory board and will be judged on the basis of their contributions to Winston-Salem's black community during 1987.

Your nominees (one for "Man of the Year" the other for "Woman of the Year") should be Winston-Salem residents and will be recognized in the Jan. 28, 1988, special edition of the *Chronicle*, as well as receive commemorative plaques. Please print legibly and be as specific as possible in describing your nominees' accomplishments.

Nominations must be received by the *Chronicle* no later than 5:30 p.m. on Jan. 8, 1988.

Woman of the Year

Nominee's Name _____

Nominee's Address _____

Occupation _____
Nominee's activities, memberships, affiliations _____

Please explain briefly why you think this person deserves to be "Woman of the Year." _____

Your Name _____

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Man of the Year

Nominee's Name _____

Nominee's Address _____

Occupation _____
Nominee's activities, memberships, affiliations _____

Please explain briefly why you think this person deserves to be "Man of the Year." _____

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