Industry that's a cut above

Black-owned barbershops, salons about more than hair

Marsha Sills
malls@theadvertiser.com

It's like Vegas or the confessionals when one takes a seat in the stylist's chair — what happens here, stays here.

Here, you can unloosen what's on your mind as well as shed what's on your head. Discuss politics or last night's game or just gossip.

Barbershops and hair salons have long been more than just businesses in the black community, as gathering places of expression, said Toni Sims, a University of Louisiana assistant professor of anthropology and sociology.

"Next to the African-American church, it serves as a place where African-Americans feel very comfortable in terms of their hair and their ability to express themselves," said Sims, whose research focuses on race and ethnicity.

But they are businesses which account for millions in sales each year. Service industry professions make up 52 percent of black-owned businesses in the United States, according to figures from the Census Bureau. Personal services, such as barber shops and hair salons, are nearly a quarter of service industry businesses owned by blacks, Census figures show.

And unlike the movie Barber Shop where a barber's son feels obligated to take over his father's shop, more and more young people are entering the profession because they feel it's their calling, Sims said.

Above, at Truman's Barbershop, Nick Bernard of Lafayette gives Nathan Glaude's beard a trim on Wednesday. At top left, clippers are lined up at a barber's station at the Lafayette shop. A sign, top right, discourages littering, but customers still stop in to chat.

As a kid, Nick Bernard would have his hair shaven at Truman's Barbershop. The shop has been a landmark in the Truman neighborhood since the 60s. He now has his own chair there, but his father was never in the business.

"My mom didn't want to let me get my hair cut the way I wanted to get it cut," Bernard said. "So when I turned 15, I got my first pair of clippers. I started cutting my own hair and then started cutting my friends' hair and realized that I had talent.

"You can't simply learn how to cut hair, said Kelly, who's been a barber for about eight years. "It's not easy to pick up," Kelly said.

Continue from Page 1D

Cut

Sandra Broussard didn't always think about becoming a hair stylist, even though her mother and grandmother had their own shops.

"I did think about other things, but my mom knew this was a good business and she was right," Broussard said.

For the past 28 years, Broussard has learned just how right her mother was.

The profession seems to be attracting more who haven't grown up in the business because of the opportunity in the black community, Sims said.

"I think for many people who are in the profession now, they chose that profession because it is one of the few areas of business in which African-Americans find they have a viable service that they can provide to other African-Americans, and they don't have to contend with many of the business issues of marketing or attempting to attract their customer base," Sims said.

The business is also one that comes with the stories of perks that can be found inside the walls of any beauty or barbershop no matter the ethnicity or who's in the chair or standing with the shears in their hand.

"It's a known fact that people gossip in a beauty parlor," Sandra Broussard, Owner, Sparks Hair Design, said. "But we call it gospel gossip," Douglas Guidry said with a smile, rising from the chair after his cut.

The talk of gossip isn't limited to the womenfolk.

"We call it gospel gossip," Douglas Guidry said with a smile, rising from the chair after his cut.

Nick Bernard cuts Nathan Glaude's hair last week at Truman's Barbershop.

Claua B. Lawless@theadvertiser.com