

A Cut Above the Rest

In the tradition of 'follow your heart,' hobbies can become lucrative businesses. Such is the case for entrepreneur DeShawn Bullard, owner of Another Look Hair Salon in Atlanta, GA. After a seven-year stint in computer programming, she made the unlikely shift to cosmetology.



DeShawn Bullard

Although the 4 billion dollar hair-care industry seems like a place where anyone can cash in—especially with the new wave of glamour-seeking ladies—Bullard never figured that she'd be into it so

deep.

"I'm a creative person. I like to use my hands a lot," Bullard states. "While I was in college, I started doing my roommate's hair and my hair, and everybody would tell me how good I was at it. Then I started doing it for extra money on the side." Bullard was born in Chicago, then attended Tuskegee College in Alabama where she majored in Computer Programming. She relocated to Atlanta after graduation to take a professional position where she could put her education to use. "When I graduated from college and started working in corporate America, I had to decide whether I wanted to go back to college and get my master's [degree] versus going to cosmetology school and getting a license. I weighed the pros and cons. I was doing hair part-time, and I was making about \$2000 a month on top of my income." Bullard reasoned that, even with a Master's Degree, her income would not be increased by the \$24,000 a year she was clearing doing hair. She factored in her passion for the hair-care hobby, and ended up deciding to pursue cosmetology as a profession.

"I worked from 1990 to 1997 as a computer programmer" Bullard says. But the excitement and diversity of cosmetology intrigued her. "You can be a make-up artist, you can be a masseuse,

you can do platform work," she says. "By the time I graduated from cosmetology school, I had already obtained a position as a platform artist with a major hair-care company. Then I got promoted to educational director for them."

Bullard left her job in 1997, and opened her own salon, *Another Look*, on Atlanta's west side. She also found opportunities to incorporate her education. Located at www.atlantasalon.com (on the web), Bullard offers a website for businesses in the beauty industry, which she says pulls about 3,000 hits per month. She also gives hair advice on-line and plans to author two books this year: a survival and marketing guide for stylists; and **From Corporate to Entrepreneurship: the Faith and the Fears**, a book about the move she made from one career to the other.

According to Bullard, there's been a gradual shift in the hair-care industry in past years that has contributed to the lucrativeness of the industry at large. She says customers used to spend money at the salon, but would spend even more at the retail counter with do-it-yourself products, such as home relaxers and color kits. But these days, according to Bullard, the services salons offer are far more advanced than customers can provide for themselves and, therefore, they are willing to pay more. Bullard says stylists in Atlanta—even in small salons—can make, on an average, \$500 - \$700 per week, with more upscale stylists clearing upwards of \$80,000 per year.

Beyond skill and creativity, however, Bullard says education is the key to being a good stylist. "You have to perfect what you do," she advises. "You have to go out and find out about new services. You have to provide professionalism and know how to do your job very well." Bullard feels there's no excuse. "There are trade

