

# BERNICE CALVIN TALKS ABOUT THE BLACK BEAUTY INDUSTRY

"The Black beauty industry has given so much to the Black people — it has given them the means of economic self-sufficiency and a way to achieve self-esteem. It is a primary route that many Black persons take to become entrepreneurs and successful business persons. And while they are being successful, they are making us beautiful. What more can you ask of an industry?"

That's Bernice Calvin talking, and she should know. She's president of Big Show Expo, the largest Black health and beauty show in the nation.

Big Show, as it was called back in the sixties, grew out of "Beauty Trade" magazine, a publication for the Black beauty professional that Calvin started with her mother, Willa Lee Calvin.

The magazine eventually became Big Show, which debuted in Washington, D.C. in 1960 with 2,000 attendees.

The first Big Show opened at the former Sheraton Park Hotel, now called the Sheraton Washington, the hotel where Big Show Expo broke all attendance records this August.

"It was difficult in the beginning to get exhibitors to understand what you are trying to do," Calvin says. "But we had the major ones and they said the show was a fantastic idea, so we kept on. It was like giving birth to an industry and it has made many companies grow and make money. When I think of where we came from and where we are now, it is mind boggling."

Today, in its 29th year, Big Show Expo attracts upwards of 20,000 attendees in three cities each year—Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Memphis.

Calvin says that Big Show Expo currently is the major

force in the industry, but she stresses that it's more than a beauty trade show.

"The industry is growing," Calvin says, "and we now have more to offer, a lot more."

And what does Big Show offer?



Bernice Calvin

Each Show has over 250 exhibits including every major manufacturer that is trying to reach the Black beauty market. There also are classes, demonstrations, product sampling, social functions, career information, dealer meetings, and hair and fashion shows.

"But we are more," Calvin says. "We are opportunity."

"Big Show Expo is a meeting of the minds of so many facets of the industry. This is what makes it fantastic—those who sell the products, the dealers, those who buy the products, and the young

people who will be our future hairdressers. We pull together all these facets that have made the industry grow."

"Big Show Expo is about the beauty industry and the professional," Calvin says. "It is definitely not just about doing hair."

riously about a career in the beauty or related industries.

"It's not enough for kids to say no to drugs. They also must say yes to a productive career. Here at Big Show Expo they see role models, Black women and men who have developed successful careers and flourishing businesses in a short amount of time."

"It is crucial that our young people have a place to reach and to grow. The industry belongs to them and we recognize that. Our emphasis is, and always has been, on education and on entrepreneurship."

"The result we want to achieve for the Black woman is economic self-sufficiency and a feeling of self worth. The beauty industry can give them that and Big Show Expo is dedicated to encouraging that concept. I call it the three E's: education, entrepreneurship, and excellence."

Big Show Expo interests more than persons in the beauty industry. The event also attracts lawyers, tax accountants, marketers, sales people, small business persons, and corporate representatives, Calvin points out.

"Big Show Expo is a showcase for Black entrepreneurship. It happens to focus on a particular service area, hair care, that Black women have excelled in, but we are not a beauty salon."

But the 1,500 volunteers each day of the Show who receive a free chemical treatment and a beauty makeover at Big Show Expo may think differently. "We and the companies who exhibit with us choose hundreds of women at each of our events—from the very young to the senior citizen—and give them their choice of a chemical treatment, that is, a new color, a permanent, or a

relaxer. These women not only leave Big Show Expo with a total new look, they are encouraged to seek out a professional to help them maintain it.

"Looking good" is not a superfluous attribute at all," Calvin says. "It has been proven that once you feel good about yourself, you will achieve more."

Calvin also talks about the importance of networking and the receptions at Big Show Expo. "We believe in social functions, the parties, because they are opportunities for east and west, north and south, to talk to each other and see each other. They compare how they are doing in business. You have got to be with each other in order to grow yourself, and you must compare."

"Big Show Expo is networking. We are competition. And we are opportunity, the opportunity for young people to set goals. I think competition is the way to go, the way to inspire yourself to achieve the best you can."

Calvin recently founded the National Black Beauty Heritage Association, a tax-exempt organization dedicated to instilling pride in the Black beauty heritage.

"To be aware of the depth of this industry's past will bring intense pride in a profession that has been such a strong livelihood for so many Black families," Calvin says.

She envisages the Association as "motivating more young people to enter this profession to give it ever-needed vitality," Calvin says. "The unemployment rate among young Blacks is staggering and the beauty progression is one of the few high-earning careers you can enter with just a high school education."

Calvin also sees the Association helping maintain and increase the number of accredited Black-owned beauty schools and "exciting Black entrepreneurs in a challenging field that has so many rewards, esthetic as well as monetary."

"We want to make all entrepreneurs realize the heights yet to be scaled — national salon franchising, chain beauty schools, broader-based manufacturing companies, multiple dealerships."

The Association is developing plans to chronicle the history of the Black beauty industry and have this information, along with a collection of beauty artifacts, available to the public through a

traveling caravan. The mobile museum will visit Black-owned beauty schools, vocational high schools, and cosmetology schools of predominantly minority students during Black History Month next February.

"We hope this traveling exhibit will help keep the dropout rate low and will encourage new vitality in the industry," says Moses Brewer of the Adolph Coors Company, which cosponsors a reception at Big Show Expo. "Hairdressers have played a key role in the survival of our community. Hairdressers were role models."

"Coors is proud to be a part of preserving the heritage and legacy of Black entrepreneurship," says Ivan Burwell, Coors' National Programs Manager. Coors is developing plans to participate in some of the Association's programs.

In addition, the Association will distribute a free publication several times a year and has plans to use top name personalities as spokespersons.

"The Association is so important," Calvin says, "because when you understand your past, it can help you to open up more ideas and put them in the works."

"George Santayana did not go far enough when he said that those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeated it. He should have added that those who DO know and understand the past will benefit significantly in the future."

"It's just the great American dream, that's all," Calvin says, "and it can be achieved through the beauty industry. It's all available right there — economic independence, self-worth, creativity, and, of course, beauty. We want to keep Black America beautiful."

## Nevada Executive Women Sponsor Seminar

As part of the group's educational objectives, NEW (Nevada Executive Women) will sponsor a seminar, "Dressing the Part," conducted by Golunda Zoet, noted wardrobe coordinator/clothing specialist, and Mackey Yost, celebrity Hair Designer, on October 19 at 7:30 P.M. with registration at 7:00 P.M. at Bally's, dealing with how to dress for your desired business objectives as well as how clothes determine our perceived status and power.

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YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO ATTEND THE CLARK COUNTY MINORITY/WOMEN BUSINESS ENTERPRISE VENDORS DAY ON OCTOBER 21, 1988, FROM 9AM UNTIL 12PM, AT THE ALADDIN HOTEL. THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MINORITY/WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS TO MEET PURCHASING PROFESSIONALS FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, AS WELL AS THE PRIVATE SECTOR. THERE WILL BE BUYERS, PURCHASING AGENTS, AND MANAGERS ON HAND TO DISCUSS HOW TO DO BUSINESS WITH EACH ENTITY. THE CLARK COUNTY MINORITY/WOMEN BUSINESS COUNCIL ENCOURAGES EACH AND EVERYONE TO JOIN US IN OUR EFFORT TO ENHANCE MINORITY/WOMEN BUSINESS ENTERPRISES. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT WAYNE WEDLOW, MBE COORDINATOR AT 455-4425.