

# C.R. oncologist details key to early success in new book

How one man's lab paved success to student in a world not built for them

By Elijah Decious, The Gazette

Today, patients in Cedar Rapids may see success when they look at Dr. Vincent Reid — a fellowship-trained surgical oncologist, medical director of Hall-Perrine Cancer Center and sought-out expert for a variety of cancers in his field.

But overcoming difficult odds after being born to a 14-year-old mother in Jamaica, surviving brief homelessness in college and dealing with adversity along the way took more than determination and talent.

It took opportunity. And the J601 lab at City College in New York with Jerry Guyden at the helm from 1986 to 2016, gave it to him.

As one of his greatest life mentors retires, Reid and co-author Michael Samms weave together scenes from the place Guyden created to help minorities thrive in a scientific and medical world not built for them.

"He ran a lab where it was less about science and more about the people," said Reid. "It was the kindness Jerry fostered that trickled down. People were there to support you."

## CULTURING THE LAB

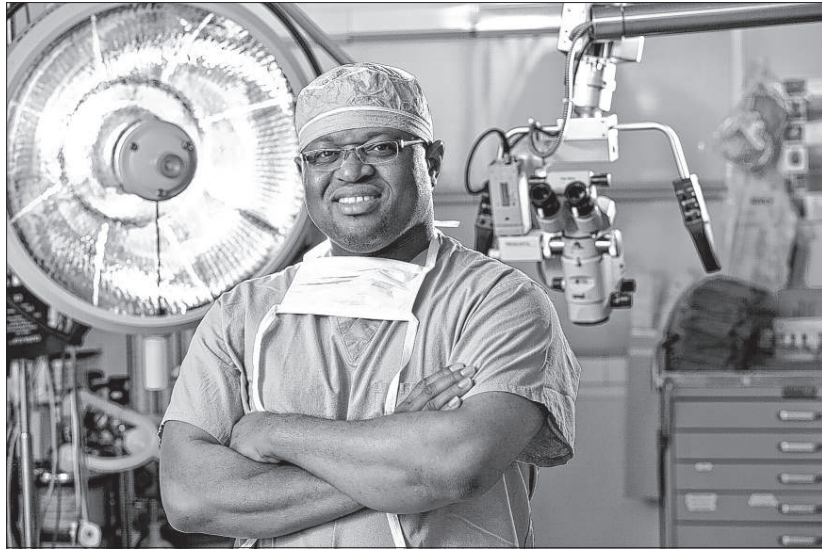
Like Reid, Guyden also had surmounted some difficult barriers to make his success.

Raised in segregated Texas, the Black high school quarterback, now 70, grew up in a time when people of different races did not mix. Recruitment opportunities for college were mostly limited in Black communities, and those recruited to the small number of integrated schools to play football could count on being bench warmers all season.

"The mindset back then in the Black community was that integration was actually going to bring equality to the community," Guyden explained. "All we had to do was compete with everyone else and everyone would understand there was no such thing as superiority or inferiority among (races of) people."

The first few years for Guyden at his integrated school were difficult. He had good grades and showed strong promise for medical school, but the faculty member in charge of the premedical school committee "wasn't sure about this whole integration thing."

With one year left in college and no way to secure vital



Dr. Vincent Reid, surgical oncologist at the Hall-Perrine Cancer Center in Cedar Rapids, has co-authored a new book this year on Dr. Jerry Guyden, a man to whom he credits much of his success. (Mercy Medical Center Cedar Rapids)



Jerry Guyden played a major role in the lives of young Black scientists and doctors like the Hall-Perrine Cancer Center's Dr. Vincent Reid in Cedar Rapids. A new book, "A Perfect Science," details how. (Jerry Guyden)

recommendations for medical school, Guyden's first dream was crushed. Later, another professor piqued his interest in becoming a scientist — offering him a research job after the student caught his eye.

"That was the first point at which someone accepted me for my intellectual talents," Guyden said.

Before long, his experiments found success and built a reputation for him. Despite pitches from Ivy League schools, Guyden eventually chose an offer to work at City College in Harlem — not just to climb the ladder to tenure, but to bring others along with him.

"I went to City College with the idea I wanted to train people who looked like me," said Guyden. "I didn't want anyone to suffer the heartbreak that I had, especially if they were qualified."

## AT A GLANCE

- **What:** "A Perfect Science: A Former Black Quarterback's Gift to Humanity"
- **Authors:** Jerry Charles Guyden, Vincent Reid and Michael Samms with contribution from Alexander Acevedo
- **Length:** 298 pages
- **Released:** April 2023
- **Cost:** Kindle version available for \$5.99, paperbacks for \$24.95 on Amazon.com

## THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENED

In a time long before "diversity, equity and inclusion" were turned into corporate buzzwords, Guyden was cultivating a room with virtually every race and culture from around the world.

Over the years, about 60 people passed through the J601 lab — most of them people of minorities. About 55 from the widely successful group still stay in touch.

"It was truly a melting pot. That was very unusual compared to other labs," said Reid. "When I got to J601, it was very different. I walked into that place and it felt like family."

And when students could not rely on their own flesh and blood, Guyden was there to help them.

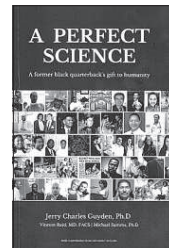
Midway into his time at City College in the late 1980s, Reid was forced to leave the New York home he shared with his father. With no where to go, he slept in the lab at night after others left.

Guyden took him in, making him not only a mentor, but a father figure in Reid's life.

"As good a scientist as he was, he was just a better person," Reid said.

Through 29 short chapters, "A Perfect Science" weaves what made the place so impactful while threading together letters from students about Guyden's role in their personal success stories.

With the series of vignettes, readers will learn about who the students were, where they came from, and what they went on to do after J601.



## WHY IT MATTERS

Everybody has certain capabilities. But not everybody has opportunities to realize their capabilities, Reid said.

"I think one of the biggest things is providing an opportunity to realize your true potential. That's what J601 did," he said.

But today, there aren't nearly as many J601 labs as there should be, he said. More Black men graduated from medical school in 1972 than in 2016, according to the American Medical Association.

"While we think we have come far ... I think it's telling," he said.

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