

Features

The smashing Sister Punkin: a mom away from home

By Gary Gray
Staff Writer

Inside Dante's, UNCA's munch and mingle headquarters, a box marked "comments" rests on the wall. The box is invariably empty. But behind the counter, an impassioned spirit is in plentiful supply.

Within the cozy confines of Dante's eatery resides one Lillian Beatrice Davis.

"Tell your mom I took good care of you," is one of her prideful messages to young students departing Dante's and heading for home.

Some students call her "Mom." Some call her "Honey." She prefers "Sister Punkin."

"That's all I know her by," said James Ray, a UNCA housekeeper for eight years.

"She smiles all the time, and she can have a conversation with anybody. She'll sing, too. She's just made that way," Ray said.

Davis, 37, is beginning her seventh year as Dante's cook, cashier, and unheralded university asset. She is in her 16th year of marriage to husband Terry, and has two children; Sherry, 16, and Terry, 9. The family lives in Asheville, and on Dec. 19, they became homeowners for the first time.

During her seven years at Dante's, Sister Punkin has become nothing less than a campus institution. One doesn't leave Dante's without noticing the one-

in-a-million woman behind the counter.

Her job at Dante's requires her to handle a number of tasks, but her number one job is making students happy.

This friendly campus character displays a keen sense of humor. During one of several funny interactions throughout the day, Sister Punkin prods student Troy Martin as he approaches the counter with his freshly-dyed head of green hair.

"Now THAT'S a personality right there," Davis said. "Are you trying to join Alpha Beta, or one of

"I don't want to hear no whoopin' and hollerin'."— Sister Punkin' on the current state of contemporary music. She prefers the Christian rock of DC Talk.

them sororities?"

Another customer approaches Sister Punkin's domain and humbly asks, "Do you accept checks here?"

"Long as they don't have rubber in 'em," she replies cheerfully.

Davis's anecdotes and personal-ity exhibit her easy manner and

her free-spiritedness. Her picture could sit next to the term happy-go-lucky in the dictionary.

"They told me when I was born, the doctor checked to see if I was okay. And when he did he called me 'punkin'," Davis said while checking the day's receipts. "The 'sister' comes from when I accepted Christ. You know, ladies in the congregation are called sister."

Dorothy Norwood's "Songs of Praise and Worship" reverberate throughout Dante's at closing time. At five p.m., an hour before closing, Davis finally sits. Her eyes survey the eatery, including the chairs now being stacked on tables by Ray.

"I like contemporary gospel like Sandy Patti and DC Talk. I don't want to hear no whoopin', and I don't want to hear no hollerin'," Davis said.

Davis smiles and rekindles memories of her upbringing. Recollections of her Aunt Nancy, admittedly her biggest influence, bring back the widest smiles. Davis brings her hands together, rhythmically, as if about to clap.

"She was a prayer warrior. She also had a good spirit," Davis said. "Still, to this day, I can remember all the spiritual things, but I can't remember any negative things. It just showed me that God allowed me to remember things that were important."

Bonnie Spell met Davis 20 years ago at Nazareth First Baptist Church. Currently, the two sing in the choir at Faith Tabernacle Christian Center.



PHOTO BY ELISE FOX

Sister Punkin serves the Dante's faithful with a smile.

Spell also sings the praises of her good friend.

"Sister Punkin works for the Intercessory Prayer Ministry," Spell said. "When she runs across somebody that needs help, she prays for them and helps direct them to the Lord. She's the kind of person that would help anybody."

The easy-going Davis believes

there is a "surrendering point" for everybody. Hers came in 1977 when friend Phillip Vernon drowned at a family picnic. The mishap occurred the same year Davis graduated from Asheville High School.

"Back then I used to like to go out and party," she said. "And I used to think, ah, I got plenty of time. There was times when I

would just be sitting at home and my whole body would feel like it was paralyzed. I couldn't move at all. And then I heard God speak to me and say 'If I wanted to take your life now, I could.' And I knew, if he could take Phillip, he could take me."

Difficult words for most, but the woman called "Sister Punkin" just smiles and makes a smooth transition to thoughts about her situation at Dante's.

"I love my job," Davis said. "My job is very rewarding to me. It doesn't pay much, but it's rewarding."

Davis often wonders how others may perceive her gregarious approach to her job and her life.

"She's real sweet," said Davis of her supervisor Amy Jackson. "But, I think she thinks I'm crazy."

Davis said some students have been coming in for years, some for days. Some who have only heard about her come in for the first time just to meet her.

Davis also said she thinks kids are under a lot of pressure these days; she sees it in their faces.

"Some don't know how to take me. But when they come in in a bad mood, they go out in a good mood," Davis said.

"I like to have fun. God wants me to have fun," Davis said. "You only live once."

With those words, the conversation ends. A smiling Davis rises and quietly walks past the empty box marked "comments." She rounds the end of the counter and disappears through Dante's kitchen doors.

FYI

For Your Information

february
20
thru
february
27

UNCA

FYI is a service of the Student Activities and Student Affairs offices.

FYI is published each Thursday. Deadline to submit information is Friday at noon, for the following week's publication. Next deadline: Feb. 21 for the Feb. 27 issue. Send a copy with basic information to The Banner, c/o Ad Manager CH 208 A.

academic notices

- Last day to withdraw from full - semester course • 2/25
- Alternate Class Schedule for Bad Weather - call UNCA SnowLine at 258 - 4646

African American Heritage Month

- Brown Bag Lunch with Dr. Don Locke, 12:15 p.m., HC 37, free (ext. 6671) • 2/20
- Diversity Simulation, 3 - 6 p.m., HC Lounge, free pizza (ext. 6671) • 2/23
- Open Mic, 9 p.m., HC Lounge, Free (ext. 6671) • 2/26
- Soul Food Dinner, 4:30 - 6:30 p.m., DH • 2/27

athletics (ext. 6459)

- Women's Basketball vs. Charleston Southern, 6 p.m., JG • 2/20
- Men's Basketball vs. UNC - Greensboro, 8 p.m., JG • 2/20
- Women's Basketball vs. Radford, 7 p.m., JG • 2/22
- Track & Field - Big South Indoor Meet, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., Health & Fitness Center • 2/22
- Men's Tennis vs. Radford Univ., 2:30 p.m., UNCA Courts • 2/23
- Big South Basketball Tournament - Lynchburg, VA
- Men's Basketball • 2/26 - 3/1; Women's Basketball • 2/27 - 3/1
- Limited number of tickets for \$15 (call ext. 6459), general admission good for all games (session tickets - \$5 at Vines Ctr. Ticket Office)

career opportunities/jobs available

- Job Fair (April 16) - Register and begin resume development now, Career Center, WHC, (ext. 6515) • by 3/1
- Register with the Career Center & submit a copy of your resume - your resume will be sent to employers looking to fill positions!, WHC
- R.A. Applications available in Housing Office • deadline 3/18

concerts/live entertainment

- Mighty Purple, original unplugged music, 9 p.m., HC Lounge, Free to UNCA Students (sponsored by UP) (ext. 6244) • 2/21
- Deborah Belcher, piano, 4 p.m., LH 018 (ext. 6432) • 2/23
- Philadanco, modern dance, tickets in HC 27, \$4 UNCA Students (ext. 6584), 8 p.m., Diana Wortham Theatre at Pack Place • 2/25
- "Open Mic" sign ups in HC 44, 9 p.m., HC Lounge (ext. 6244) • 2/26

etc.

- Bingo, 9 - 11 p.m., HC Lounge (sponsored by Residence Life) (ext. 6700) • 2/24
- Movie Tickets - \$4 UNCA Students, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., HC 27
- Opening Doors - "A Dialogue on Racism," 3 - 5 p.m., HC Lounge (Registration forms available) (ext. 6671) • 2/25 - 4/22
- Charlotte Hornets Tickets for 2/21 game, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., HC 27
- Buses for public stop on campus - covered shelter across from Robinson Hall - schedule posted inside shelter

etc. cont.

- Spanish Table, for anyone wanting to listen to or practice speaking; noon, PDR • Wednesdays
- Escort service from any area on campus - call Public Safety or use yellow box at Vance Hall (ext. 6710)
- Poetry Reading: UNCA Poets Tracy Wilson & Blake Smith, 7 p.m., Urthona Gallery, 91 Patton Ave. • 2/21
- Murder Mystery (3/5) sign ups in Housing Office • thru 2/27

exhibits

- Jason D. Watson Exhibition "four," RL • thru 2/28
- Children's Art Exhibits, Ramsey Library/ Zageir Hall Education Lobby - Rotating Exhibit
- Annual Art Alumni Exhibition, Univ. gallery, 1st floor, OH • thru 2/25
- Photographs by Ken Betsalel, YMI Cultural Ctr. • thru 3/2

films

- "Aids Research: The Story So Far," 4 p.m., Laurel Forum, KH (sponsored by Health Promotion) • 2/20

lectures

- "Religion and Political Progress in 'Angels in America,'" by Michael Evenden, 4 p.m., OCC (sponsored by Latter Day Saints Student Assoc. & Jewish Student Org.) • 2/21
- "Terrorism and Crime: A More Dangerous World" by Dr. Mark West, 7:30 p.m., OCC, free to UNCA Students (ext. 6140) • 2/24

organizations - special programs

- Professor of the Year Contest, 25¢ per vote - all money to charity, (DH & RL) (sponsored by Alpha Phi Omega & Theta Chi) • 2/17 - 2/21
- "Meterological Radio Broadcasting" by Scott Lowrimora, Weather Channel / UNCA graduate, 7:30 p.m., RH 125 (spon. by UNCA Chapter of Amer. Meter. Socieity) • 2/26

outdoor activities/recreation

- Wall Climbing at ClimbMax, Sign up HC 44, \$2, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. • 2/20
- Ski Lift Tickets to Wolf Laurel - REDUCED PRICE \$10 with UNCA I.D., 11 a.m. - 4 p.m., Mon. - Sun. at HC Information Desk
- Equipment rental, HC Outdoor Education office (ext. 6001) New Hours: 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. M - Fri/7 - 9 p.m. M - Thurs.

theatre

- "Angels in America," 2 p.m., 8 p.m., CBT (253 - 5778) • thru 2/23

volunteer opportunities

- See Bulletin Board in HC Lobby
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters Teams "Bowl for Kids Sake" - community day bowling fundraiser, reserve a space or receive a team packet (ext. 6685) • 3/1