



Student/models (Top row Left-right) Elgin Phillips, Isac Manns, Darius Williams (middle) Dominic Totten, Brandon Hughes, Lauren Pointer (Front) Kryss Sammuels, Tiera Stith and Josh Deal.

Photo by Layla Farmer

## SUBSTANCE OVER STYLE

*Troupe focuses on self-esteem, service*

BY LAYLA FARMER  
THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem State University's Epiphany modeling troupe has always strived to make a statement when they hit the stage, but organizers says the group is more than just a bunch of pretty faces.

"We try to build people's self esteem and their confidence level thorough performance," explained 24 year-old Dominic Totten, an Epiphany scene coordinator and long-time member. "We're a models' group and we have fashion shows where (our members) model, but we also have talks with them about how to present yourself ... as a young woman or a young man that's about to be a professional."

Founded in 2001, Epiphany is one of two modeling troupes on the WSSU campus. The organization, which has more than 50 active members, performs at various events on and off campus, gracing the runways with the attitude and flair that is known

as urban modeling. The models in Epiphany don't necessarily look like the impossibly tall, reed-thin figures that are most often found on runways in fashion destinations worldwide, and that is part of the point of the organization, said President Brandon Hughes.

"We have every shape, every color, every size (of model)," said the 22 year-old. "...That is what Epiphany is really all about. You don't have to be the stereotypical image of a model to be beautiful."

The group members are as varied in their interests and majors as they are in their appearance, Hughes said.

"It's a very diverse group and I think that's what's helped us out over the years," said the Charlotte native. "We have different disciplines and everybody can bring something different to the table."

The group puts on two fashion shows each year, showcasing the works of local designers and their own tweaks to ready-to-wear fashions. The shows incorporate dramatic elements, making them more like a cross between a play and a fashion show, Totten said.

Participating in the performances is always a treat, Totten

said. "When the lights come on and the curtains open, you transform into this alter ego character of yourself," related the Burlington native. "It's just like this big euphoric moment."

The group's recent spring show, "Lovesick," included a socially conscious element as well, addressing controversial topics such as self mutilation, suicide and domestic violence before a sold-out crowd at the school's Dillard Auditorium last week. Proceeds from the show, an excess of \$1,000, were allocated by the group for AIDS Care Services.

"With the past two executive boards, we just haven't been afraid to go there," Epiphany Vice President Allen Lockhart, 24, said of the organization's willingness to tackle the tough issues. "People love us for that, because we try to bring something different (to the forefront)."

Hughes, a business administration major, says being in Epiphany has made a big difference for him in the classroom.

"Epiphany's really helped me with my confidence because I used to be very shy," he remarked. "Being a business major and a Spanish

minor, we have a lot of presentations. I used to dread that ... now, it's not a problem."

After college, Lockhart, a senior, mass communications major, and Totten, a senior, elementary education major, say they plan to take the lessons they've learned to the masses. The twosome hopes to help found modeling troupes in some local high schools, as a means of building the poise and confidence of students there.

Though all three men will soon be leaving the WSSU campus behind in pursuit of their respective careers, they say the lessons they learned and the memories they created will live on.

"For me, the best part was when we all let our hair down and we reflect on the stress and the fun and everything that we went through (to put on a show)," Lockhart said. "It was just so much fun to have these connections with people."



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