

**Tour**

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familiar with them.

The bus stopped to allow riders to peruse and shop at locations like Special Occasions, an Afrocentric book and gift store located in a house at the corner of Lawrence Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive.

Tonya McDaniel bought keepsake cardholders bearing the emblems of two historically black colleges she attended. She said she normally avoids the frenzy of Black Friday and took the tour to see how she could better support black businesses.

"I want to sow my dollars into the African-American community," she said.

Special Occasions, owned by Winston-Salem Black Chamber founders Ed and Miriam McCarter, closed its previous MLK Drive location in 2011 after 27 years of business. Owner Ed McCarter said his store, like many brick and mortar book stores, was struggling. His store's closure gave Forsyth Seafood, another black-owned business,



Ed McCarter welcomes Randon Pender, left, and others to Special Occasions.

space to build a parking lot.

McCarter said he got "bored" and decided to reopen the store last year. The house the store now calls home is a stone's throw away from the site where the store stood. He said customers have yet to discover that the store is back.

"It's been slow, and part of it is being a small entrepreneur. I'm not able to advertise and let people know I've gone back into business," he said.

Body and Soul, a popular Trade Street boutique, was already bustling with business when the bus tour

participants arrived.

Jason Pender, Randon's son, browsed the shop's jewelry, crafts, soaps, books and other wares with his daughter, Serenity, who was drawn to a ring that she ended up purchasing. Despite his mom's advocacy, Jason admitted that he, too, is in the dark about the existence of local black businesses. He said many others are as well.

"In my opinion, the awareness isn't as much as it should be, as much as it could be," he said.

Dana Suggs, who owns Body and Soul with her husband Michael, said sales on Small Business

Saturday were "phenomenal." She repeatedly thanked her customers for their support as they waited in line to check out.

"We try to be there for them, which is why we're here to supply them with items they're not going to find at the mall," she said.

American Express started the Small Business Saturday campaign in 2010 to encourage consumers to patronize small businesses on the day after Black Friday. This was the first year the Black Chamber supported the initiative with a bus tour, which also included visits to the N.C. Black Repertory Company, Zael's Florist on Dominion Street and Ladies First Shoe Boutique on Peters Creek Parkway. A variety of other businesses, including law firms and insurance offices, were also visited. Carolina Vineyard and Hops was the last stop on the tour.

Vendors who belong to the black chamber also got to participate. They set up display tables at the Enterprise Center. They included 5LINX and AKS Gifts & Promotionals LLC.

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