

A LOOK BACK: NATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FESTIVAL

Jimmie "JJ" Jeter comes home for two reunions

Family reunion and NBTF lead star to Winston-Salem

BY FELECIA PIGGOTT-LONG, PH.D.
FOR THE CHRONICLE

Jimmie "JJ" Jeter performed for the Teen Theatre of the North Carolina Black Repertory Company before he completed high school at the North Carolina School of the Arts. He is currently in his senior year of study as a performer at The Julliard School in New York City.

He came home this week for two reunions — his family reunion and the National Black Theatre Festival 2015. He will perform in the N. C. Black Repertory Company's production of "The Glory of Gospel." Between practices for the production, he found time to greet his family members and rehearse for the talent show after dinner.

The theme for the 17th annual family reunion of the Gaymon, Gibson, Miller and Ridgill families was "Recognizing the Accomplishments of Our Past: Celebrating the Possibilities for the Future." The family reunion is based on the cultural movement of the Harlem Renaissance. Jeter's Aunt Aggress Polite is proud that the committee chose this moment in time to celebrate.

"The committee was inspired by the works of The National Black Theatre Festival, which is held in Winston-Salem during the same time of year that our family reunion is held. We decided that we should focus on the Harlem Renaissance for the theme of our reunion banquet," she said.

"The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural movement that spanned the 1920s into the 1930s. The development of every major artistic and literary form that we now associate with African-American life and culture can be attributed to this period in our history," said Jeter. "We showcased a short glimpse of the artistic talents in our family during the banquet."

Jeter directed the talent portion of the family reunion. The theme for the banquet was "Old Hollywood Meets the Harlem Renaissance. Jeter presented "The Renaissance in Revue." He welcomed the family before the opening act.

"I want to welcome everyone to travel with me and open their imaginations to the 1920s, the age of The New Negro, The Harlem, home of the Cotton Club, Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, James Weldon Johnson, Wallace Henry Thurman and Zora Neale Hurston," Jeter said. "You will go on a journey that will challenge you to think tonight. We want you to hoop and holler when the spirit moves you and get up and dance when you feel an itchin' in your feet. Tonight we will connect our past with our future with song, poetry, and movement. Our family reunion is about us, our community, our legacy, our conversations, but ultimately, our history."

For Jeter, family reunions are important. He wrote and directed the program for the family reunion. He was glad the family chose to focus on the Harlem Renaissance.

"It seemed appropriate. It makes me go back to the root of modern-day black culture. I love the dignity, the sophistication of the Harlem Renaissance. It is a great reminder that we are people of power," said Jeter.

He also values the

family reunion and the gathering of people for the Theatre Festival.

"The family reunion is a reminder of where I came from. It gives me chills to think about love and support of family. But it is also scary sometime to face the realities of today," Jeter said. "When you are away from home, at school dealing with various cultures, it is easy to forget. When I come home to my family reunion, I am reminded of who I am. I am reminded there is a true foundation; that is family. I always look forward to reconnecting with my family in the theater, also. The Festival is also a reminder of who I am as an artist."

Jeter performed an excerpt from August Wilson's play "Gem of the Ocean." He also performed the poem "Let America Be America Again." He also challenged the parents in the room with a monologue based on Dr. Julia Hare's essay "State of the Black Union Address" in 2007.

Jeter chose the Hare address to leave a special message with his family.

"I love the way she ties in family at the core of decisions, of who we want to be. It all starts in the home. The community holds us accountable. We bear the responsibility of our decisions. It starts in the home first," said Jeter. "The older you get, the more you see the importance of family. I want my family to walk away from the reunion with knowledge. I encourage all people to take the time for reunions. They are great reminders of who we are."



Above (L-R) Joi Jeter, Jimmie "JJ" Jeter and mother Sonya Waddell embrace.



To the left Jimmie "JJ" Jeter performs a monologue from August Wilson's "Gem of the Ocean."

Child Development Center

Child development services are from 6:30 am to 6 pm. (Second shift services also available at select locations). Breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack are provided as part of our regular program.

The adjustment to a new center is different for every child. Before enrolling, we encourage "mini visits" to the center to allow you and your child the opportunity to see our staff and become familiar with the surroundings.

Infant and toddler care offers an opportunity for our staff to share in a special relationship with your family. Each baby has a crib and storage area.

MudPies has adopted the "Creative Curriculum" which combines social, physical, cognitive and language development as well as various methods of teaching to help mold and develop the minds of children. All of our preschool age children participate in a graduation ceremony to embark upon kindergarten.

Founded in 1970 as a non-profit organization, to support families by helping them meet the developmental needs of their children from infancy through school-age.

MudPies is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors that consists of private and public citizens, and parents of Forsyth, Davie, and Stokes counties. MudPies has the overall capacity to serve 700 children and families in community childcare centers.

WILKIE DOWNTOWN CENTER
Physical Address:
201 North Main Street, Suite 1200
Winston-Salem, NC 27101

WILKIE WESTING ADDRESS
251 East 7th Street
Winston-Salem, NC 27101

Telephone: 336.725.1215
Fax: 336.725.1211
Email: info@mudpies.org
Website: www.MudPies.org

Innovative Child Care Downtown Winston-Salem

CURRENTLY ENROLLING

Traditional Day Students Birth to Age 5
Before & After Care for Ages 5 - 12
Summer Camp Students Ages 5 - 12
June 15 - August 21, 2015 (7 am - 6 pm)

Schedule a tour!

MudPies Downtown East
MudPies Downtown
MudPies King
MudPies Mocksville

"Providing quality child care for tomorrow's leaders, since 1970!"

MUDPIES is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, Incorporated 1971.

MudPies

NORTHWEST CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

Phenomenal Teachers • Latest Technology
Excelling in Kindergarten & Life's Road Ahead

336.448.0341 - Downtown East
336.725.4772 - Downtown
336.983.9698 - King
336.751.5298 - Mocksville