



# ENTERTAINMENT

## The Excelsior Club New Year Promises New Direction

By Loretta Richardson  
Post Staff Writer

Ushering in the new year with a slight shift in direction the Excelsior Club, Charlotte's first private black social club, recently held its grand opening after months of extensive renovation.

Responsible for the club's facelift is Pete Cunningham, a local businessman and a NC House of Representative. His thrust for the Excelsior, since acquiring the historic landmark in April, has been to maintain the present clientele while implementing new programs and promotions that will appeal and attract a younger crowd.

"The grand opening was fantastic. The mix was very good," says Cunningham.

Seemingly, the \$40,000 invested in renovations are already paying off. When the club opened for the weekend, both young and old were on hand to revel in the changes.

"The responses have been very complimentary. Patrons have started calling the establishment, the new club Excelsior," says Cunningham.

According to Cunningham, there has been nothing but applause for the interior and exterior changes that have taken place. Roof repairs, downstairs' restrooms, new sound equipment, an increased bar area and mirrors all have served to enhance the club's decor.

But physical changes aren't the only kind of changes that Excelsior members and their guests will be seeing in the near future.

Each night at the club will offer a different attraction. One night will showcase local talent. Another night will be set aside for games like bid whist, pi-

nochle and backgammon. Still another night will be reserved for joggers exercising by dancing in the comfort of their sweatsuits.

Late Friday and Saturday nights will feature breakfast at the Excelsior and each Tuesday evening from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. there's all the fish you can eat for \$3.

Beginning in February, a monthly calendar will be published and later on in the spring, more live performances can be expected.

Cunningham advises that people interested in joining the club be aware of the state law that requires a three day waiting period for granting new memberships.

"If there is a special event someone is awaiting before they join the club, then he or she needs to apply for membership prior to that event," Cunningham says.

As the new owner of Charlotte's oldest black club, Cunningham is keenly aware of the rich heritage and tradition of the establishment. He says that it is the club's new focus that will help preserve that tradition.

"We (staff) want to maintain the tradition the club has earned through the years and the way to do that is to bring in new blood," says Cunningham.

Cunningham is not concerned that the new breed of people the Excelsior attracts ranks in a certain income bracket. "It's much more important that they have the right attitude," says Cunningham.

That attitude is the desire to party in a hassle-free and safe environment.

Cunningham's purchase of the



Photo By Calvin Ferguson

Excelsior came as a result of buying out Ken Koontz and settling a financial obligation with Phil Hatchett. Both Hatchett and Koontz had purchased the Excelsior from Jimmie McKee, the original owner in 1984.

Jimmie McKee began the Excelsior Club in 1944 with the idea of filling a void in the black

community.

McKee who had served at parties and tended bar at the city's country club realized that the need for such a club was important to the black community.

The seven room two story house that McKee purchased in 1944 was remodeled and opened with a small bar and

seating capacity for 75.

Throughout the years, though, the nature of the Excelsior Club was to change. The club's exclusive membership of doctors, lawyers, educators and businessmen made it ideal for the cultivation of local and statewide politics. The club also became the home for a number of

bridge, social, civic, fraternity and sorority organizations. Even celebrities like Nat King Cole graced its confines.

Over 40 years later, the Excelsior and what it has represented remains unblemished. Its prestige and status remain intact. Only today, under Cunningham's direction more enjoy it.

### Old, New Tradition



New Year's Revelers  
Party Hardy!!



Photo by Calvin Ferguson

THE FRIENDS OF THE ARTS throw quite a party in the Johnson C. Smith Student Union. Revelers included (l-r) Mrs. Hester Johnson, Joe Graham, the New Year's Baby, and Nancy Stroud.



Charlotte's First Nite extravaganza drew tens of thousands Charlotteans.

Photo by Frank J. Williams



Photo by Calvin Ferguson

They boogied right into the New Year at the Friends Of The Arts New Year party.

