

# African dance reaches to community

By **PATRICIA BOVERS**  
Special to the Tar Heel

Beverly Botsford, a Chatham county resident, has been attending Chuck Davis community outreach classes for four years now, learning the dances of Africa. She takes class at the Hayti Cultural Center in Durham.

"I love it. I can't get enough," Beverly said. "I play the congos myself, so I like to hear the drummers."

She also likes to dress in traditional African garb for the class, wearing the tie-dyed cotton pants she made in the daba style. Daba are pants made with a drawstring waist and lots of fabric between the legs which allow for greater freedom of movement.

Bill Thompson, an Ecology professor at Duke University, is as enthusiastic about the class. "I like the drummers, and I like to do the dances that people really do," he said.

This is Thompson's second summer with Chuck Davis. During the winter, he teaches Eastern European folk dance.

Chuck chides his students for not dancing with enough energy and feeling. Many are red-faced and sweaty, but Chuck won't let them get away with any lethargic movements.

"A dancer dances from the core," he said. "Look alive. Look happy. We thank God for giving us the arms to do this."

Davis likens dance to a "deliberation of life, a perpetual process of which we are all a part. It began in Mother Africa, manifests itself in us today, and will continue through all time."

To Davis, community is all important. "That's my personal thing—community and respect for other people," he said.

"The importance of community was impressed upon me by my parents and the people I grew up among," Davis said. "When I grew older, I went to Africa to study and adapted easily. In African tradition, there's no such thing as an audience."

Chuck Davis and his company teach and perform in schools, community centers, 4-H clubs, Salvation Army Boys Clubs, and cultural centers. They even teach in prisons. Again this year, they taught a class

at the Correctional Center for Women in Raleigh. July 18, the inmates of the prison will present a final concert that concludes this summer's activities.

"We are working hard on our performance," Chuck said. "There will be dances and a fashion show of African clothes, followed by a reading of poems the inmates have written on African themes."

Last year, the American Dance Festival expanded its Community Outreach Program to include a year-round schedule—with programs in November, January, and March—in towns across North Carolina, from Asheville to Wilmington.

"The American Dance Festival feels a strong commitment to community," said Charles Reinhart, Director of the American Dance Festival.

This is Chuck Davis's fourth year as Director of the American Dance Festival's Community Outreach Program. A native of Raleigh, Davis is a member of the Education Panel for the National Endowment for the Arts. His dance company tours the United States, Europe and Africa, and his reputation is building.

"Dance comes from the community," he said. "We feel we should take it back to them and let them share in the cycle."

Reinhart describes Davis as a "Pied Piper." "The man is magic. Anyone will follow him anywhere and have the time of his life doing it."

Occasionally, community outreach blossoms into serious dance performance. This is the case with the Weaver Street Dancers, led by local dancer Ivy Burch. The troupe of Durham girls, aged 8-15, perform on their own, an offshoot of the Weaver Street Center Community Outreach class.

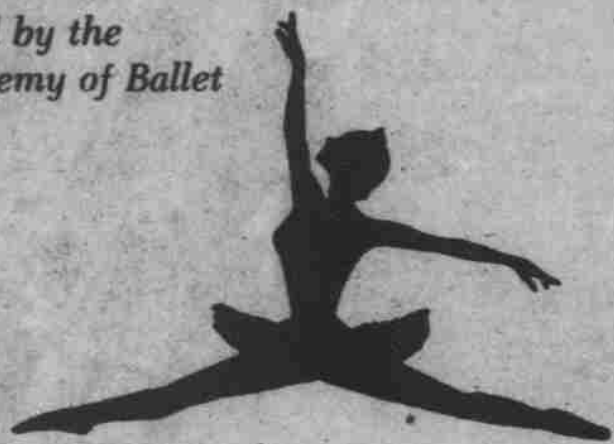
On July 25, Chuck Davis and the Weaver Street Dancers will visit the WRAL children's television show, "Frog Hollow." This daily children's show airs at 10 a.m., and has received two national awards, one from Action for Children's TV, the other from IRIS awards.

One of the Weaver Street dancers, Venita Ashford, was selected to receive a scholarship from the Association for the American Dance Festival this year. The scholarship honors Chuck Davis.

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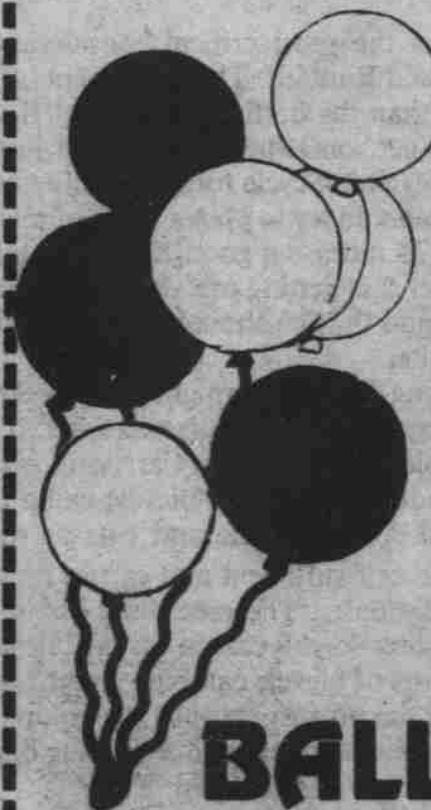
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