

# ECSU's Nikita Sutton: a rising star who keeps her feet on the ground

By Trenace Fayton

Nikita Sutton offers living proof to the old adage "Dynamite comes in small packages."

This soft-spoken ECSU junior from Elizabeth City stands only one inch over five feet, but every inch is packed with talent, character, and determination to succeed.

She has already proven herself to be a "rising star" at ECSU. This past summer she won the National Miss Black and Gold Pageant representing Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. In 1992, she was the National Oratorical Winner for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

In addition to being active in SGA and the Student Leadership Academy, she has also attracted much praise and notice through her performances with ECSU's Concert Choir, of which she is a member.

"Anyone who has heard her sing 'Precious Lord' is sure to have felt chills running down their spines," said Stephen March, an assistant professor in the Dept. of Language, Literature & Communication. "Nikki gets down into the marrow of a song and she brings it straight to your heart."

Sutton said she loves singing with the choir. "Mr. Hines has really helped me increase my vocal range and develop more control," she says. "It took me three years to learn how to breathe correctly."

Sutton, whose career plans include a recording contract as a gospel artist, was strongly influenced by her church, Faithway Church of Jesus in the Apostolic Faith.

"We believe strongly in baptism in Jesus' name and in keeping the Sabbath holy," she says. "Our sabbath is Saturday and that has caused a lot of questions in the community."

Sutton described her church as being "concise and to the point. They do not believe in wearing pants, earrings, make-up, skirts above the knee, or rings. Cutting your hair is out of the question, and short sleeves are out, too."

Sutton said she followed these precepts when she was younger "because I had to be obedient. But as I got older I felt it was unnecessary stuff that I did not want to abide by. I might be getting myself in trouble, but I decided to do what I want to do without being disrespectful. I agree with their teachings, but I want to come to that on my own."

Sutton said she appreciates her church and praises its role in her development. However she adds that she is still "in a



Nikita Sutton, winner of the National Miss Black and Gold Pageant representing Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, relaxes on the yard. In 1992 Sutton was the National Oratorical winner for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

developmental stage. I am not going to put on a front for anyone."

Sutton, who feels religious denominations are not that important, also believes in allowing others their own religious preferences. "I will not push my beliefs on you, and everyone has a right to believe what they want. We are all trying to get to the same place. We read the same Bible, and Jesus has the final say anyway."

The oldest child of ten children, Sutton said she grew up in a good "old school" home in which she was taught to say "Yes, ma'am, no ma'am, and yes sir."

Her mother, a high school English teacher in Edenton, stopped working for six years to take care of the children, recalls Sutton, who adds that she, too,

helped out with child care.

"It was an experience you will never believe," she recalls. "I was washing dishes and changing diapers before the age of nine. I lost a little of my childhood. I grew up quickly but learned a lot in the process. A lot of the values my mom and dad placed upon me will branch off into what I teach my own children."

She continues to think of herself in a maternal role where her younger siblings are concerned.

"John, Michael, Abel and Johnathan are my babies and will do anything for me," she says. "Sandra looks up to me. She likes to sing, too."

Sutton credits her father Ernest Sutton as being her primary mentor.

"My dad is a smart man," she says. "I find myself thinking things through, just like him. I am getting to the point where I am so much like him. Our ideas can clash because of that. But if I were to go to anybody with reservations about something it would be him." Sutton says her father also influenced her career choice. He is the superintendent Maple Prison for the N.C. Department of Corrections.

"My major is criminal justice, and he is a big reason for that."

Although she is close to her dad, Sutton admits that their strong personalities have occasionally clashed.

"I received my last whipping when I was sixteen years old. I was subtly rebellious and still am. He would tell me to do something, and I would hear him, but still do my own thing."

Sutton said she describes herself as "quietly stubborn," which means "I am not the type of person to cause an outburst when I disagree with something. I will either say it softly or not speak."

Sutton's hobbies include reading, oratorical speaking, acting, writing stories and listening to music. Her pet peeve is seeing "men or women go in excess of their drinking capacity and 'untrained children who act as if they have no home training.'"

Sutton's "ideal man" is a person "who can get along with me, who's open to new things—spontaneous. Everybody says they want a man they can trust, but when you find that true love, everything will fall into place."

She is now in a "long distance" relationship.

"He does fit the ideal category," says Sutton. "The relationship is serious at the moment, but we have established that while we are so distant, we are 'very special' friends. Since we are apart, we realize we might make mistakes. We love each other very much."

Sutton has a positive relationship with ECSU. "I love the people here, and I would like to thank ECSU for supporting me."

She considers student participation to be low, however, and would like to see more students vote.

Her advice to ECSU students: "Be yourself. Know who you are before you get here so you won't be swayed into another life style that's not you. Choose friends carefully."

After graduating from ECSU Sutton plans to attend law school and work in the area of civil rights law. "I plan to work for the NAACP or the SCLC," she says.

*"Be yourself. Know who you are before you get here so you won't be swayed into another life style that's not you. Choose friends carefully."*