

NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

VSOP² Hair Express & Afri-Dy Nail Express— “Keeping Love in the Air”

Stephanie Fikes-Jackson says she loves working with NCCU students. “It makes me youthful. They give me insight and I give them wisdom,” says Fikes-Jackson, owner of Afri-Dy Nails. Afri-Dy is a business housed inside VSOP² Hair Express, a business owned by Mina Forte, who grew up in the NCCU neighborhood.

VSOP² Hair Express and Afri-Dy Nail Express are one of the perks found in the community surrounding the university campus. The full service beauty salon is located right across the street from the Farrison-Newton Communication Building at 1616 Fayetteville Street.

VSOP—an acronym for Very Soul Of Perfection—is the second of two beauty salons owned and operated by Forte, the other is on Trent Drive in Durham. Five hair technicians work at VSOP² fulfilling students’ beauty needs. They do color, style, twists and braids. They even braid men’s hair.

Afri-Dy Nails—a combination of “Africa” and Dymond, Fikes-Jackson’s daughter—employs three nail technicians offering everything from acrylic nails to eyebrow and mustache waxing to henna painting. Hand painted nail art is also a specialty of the house. Fikes-Jackson has been a nail technician for 13 years. She plans to expand and says she is interested in developing aroma-therapy meditation services on a franchise level.

In the past, the 1616 Fayetteville location has been a restaurant and a copy center according to Forte. She bought the business last year, and hopes someday to have a full spa hip-hop and junior salons.

“I have always wanted a business here. I just didn’t know what it would be,” says Forte. She also felt that the location would be great for students, faculty and administration. “A nice upscale salon, putting a little flavor in the area,” she says.

NCCU students are important clients and both businesses want to become more involved in student life here at NCCU. Prices are pro-rated for students, and they offer specials. In fact, there will be a Homecoming midnight madness special when the salon will stay open until 2 a.m. Friday, Oct. 29, “so students can go to the party, sweat their hair out dancing, and then go get it done for the game.”

“This is a time for freedom of hair. You can do what you want to do,” says Forte.

African American and Caucasian hairstyles are merging and blending, according to Forte. White people are starting to get their hair styled in African American styles—like braids and locks—and African Americans are turning to Caucasian styles—like bobs and shags. “All hair is the same. The chemical make-up is the same,” she says.

“The only difference is the texture. Once you have an understanding of texture, nationality doesn’t matter.”

Fikes-Jackson says that nail care has changed in the last few years. It is more precise and health conscience, and that there is greater availability of licensed technicians. African Americans prefer a more dramatic look that includes more styles and colors, more creativity, while Caucasians prefer a more conservative look.

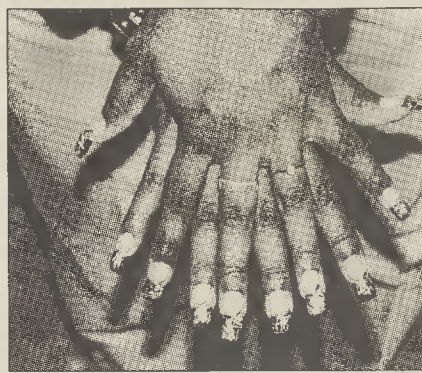
According to Forte everyone in the building likes to think of themselves as team members. As Fikes-Jackson puts it: “Keeping love, love, love in the air.”



Top left and right: Afri-Dy Nail Express owner, Stephanie Fikes-Jackson examining the hair of a smiling Melvita Bridges. In the background is Nafisah Carter, beautician. Fikes-Jackson then applies the finishing touches to Bridges’ nails.

Story by Ta-Mela Jeffries

Photos by Rashawn Rucker



Middle left: Home of VSOP² and Afri-Dy Nail Express at 1616 Fayetteville
Center middle: The finished product, Claudia Simpson’s hands
Middle right: VSOP² owner, Mina Forte



Jennifer Lanier before and after Mina Forte’s handiwork



Hannah Nealis works on Central student, Leah Stewart

A stunning production of a life well-spent: Constance Star/Ida B. Wells

By RAINAH SIMMONS
ECHO STAFF WRITER

The Playmakers Repertory Company production of “Constant Star,” a play on the life of legendary Ida B. Wells, was so successful that the company was forced to extend the Sept. 22-Oct. 17 run until Oct. 24. The show was at Paul Green Theatre at UNC-Chapel Hill. It is a must see for all races, ages, and creeds. It is a wonderful portrayal of the life of a remarkable figure. Many may have never heard of Wells, but if they saw this play they would never forget her.

Five extra-ordinary women joined to present a collage of Wells’ life. Trazana Beverly and Brenda Thomas starred. Beverly has won a Tony Award for her role in “For Colored Girls who have Committed Suicide” and starred in the film “Beloved.” Brenda Thomas played Sadie Delaney in the Playmakers production of “Having Our Say.”

The play begins with the women enter loudly calling Wells name. They recite speeches from her life, and alternate playing Wells. Their versatility is unprecedented. The scenes combined colorful details of Wells child and family life until her death. Although Wells was only 16 years old when her parents died, she refused to let her brothers and sisters be split up. She assumed the responsibility of raising them.

Wells’ love-hate relationships with other historical characters is creatively portrayed. Susan B. Anthony wanted Wells to attend her march in support of women suffrage movement, but wanted to march in the back with “her people.” Wells had her assistant write her back to say she would not be able to attend, but Wells did attend and, by waiting for Anthony to turn a corner, ended up beside Anthony during the famous march.

Other characters portrayed include Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey and Booker T.

Washington.

Wells’ life was her struggle, and the struggle of her people. When three black men established a successful store, which competed with a white-owned store, they were lynched. This event led Wells to cry out against the injustice.

Her newspaper, The Free Press, was burned down in Memphis. She left Tennessee and was later ejected from a first-class car after refusing to go sit with her “kind” in the smoking car. She rebutted that the smoking car was no place for a lady and that she paid for a seat and was staying. She was removed from the car forcibly, and thrown off at the stop. She held on to her ticket and sued the train company. She won the case, but the decision was overturned in the State Supreme Court.

The play has its beautiful moments. The hummed spiritual “Hush, Hush, Somebody’s Calling My Name.” The moment the sassy Kimberly Hawthorne sashays in a spectacular red dress the night Wells meets her future husband.

The sets for each scene were creative and imaginative. In one there is an office with book cases, tables, chairs, and office supplies, including a nineteenth century typewriter. In Wells’ early life, sheets cover the tables and the ladies use the tables as ironing boards.

When Wells parents died, the ladies folded the sheets-giving the appearance that deceased parents were in the sheets. The ladies lifted the sheets over their heads like pall bearers and went out.

The costumes were magnificent. Wells had her clothes tailored to her taste. The outfits were professional and some exquisite, especially for a “colored woman” in the south in the 1900s.

Director Tazewell Thompson outdid himself in the remarkable presentation of this American legend.

Playmakers Repertory Company

Constant Star

From the Life of Ida B. Wells

Constant Star

From the Life of Ida B. Wells

Constant Star

From the Life of Ida B. Wells

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