

Winston-Salem Moves Up to U.S. News and World Report

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. Watching 12-year old dancer Jose Pitts execute an elegant routine, it is hard to imagine that two years ago he had never seen ballet, much less performed in it. "We were playing in the school gym," he recalls, "when some people looked at us and said to me: 'You look like a dancer?'" Jose said, "Yes," and his parents -- a machinist and a domestic servant -- agreed. He still plays with his friends, but his main interests revolve around studies at the North Carolina School of the Arts and activities such as auditioning for a role in "The Nutcracker."

Jose is among hundreds of resident of this city of 145,000 whose lives have been transformed by a cultural revolution. Over the past 30 years, Winston-Salem has built an arts empire that includes museums, theater groups, a symphony orchestra, four colleges, a dance company, an opera group and an artists colony of about 500.

What's more, the center of the city, which appeared to be dying not long ago, is blossoming under the impact of major new cultural complexes. Now under construction are the 100-seat Roger L. Stevens Center for the Performing Arts and a new Winston Square that will include studios, small theaters, a park and exhibition space for arts.

Nearby, along streets where "vacancy" signs are riddled, the revitalization has helped attract new office buildings, stores, restaurants and other commercial operations which about 250 million dollars is slated to be spent. Old neighborhoods of once fading Georgian houses in the center also are being refurbished by new occupants ranging from wealthy executives to less affluent mechanics and

The turnaround is amazing," says R. Philip Hanes, Jr., a member of one of the

area's most prominent families and a leader in the revival. "Before 1949, there was practically nothing cultural here except for religious music. Now, this is one of the most important cultural centers in the country, and it just keeps getting better."

Rich Musical Tradition

The seeds for cultural growth were planted at the time of the city's settlement in 1753 by Moravian Protestants. They brought a rich musical tradition, which they used to create one of the nation's most valuable collections of native-American musical scores. They were also responsible for the formation of the still flourishing curriculum of music at Salem Academy and College, located among the carefully restored brick and frame buildings of Old Salem village.

Observes Alicia Stephens of Salem College: "For many years, the school in Salem was the only center of culture in an otherwise arid wilderness. While others in the country were hearing only fiddle and Jew's-harp rhythms, those in the Salem area expected nothing less than Handel and Bach."

Until recently, much of the community's energy was concentrated on building a strong commercial base. The city is the home of such firms as R. J. Reynolds Industries, Inc., with international interests from cigarettes to shipping lines, and the Hanes Corporation with products from stockings to underwear. Dozens of millionaires live here, and the mansions gracing street after street in the forested suburbs attest to that wealth.

For years, much of Winston-Salem's culture was hidden behind the walls of those estates. In some homes, original paintings by Mary Cassatt and Winslow Homer hung in sitting rooms, seen only by the homeowners and their invited guests. In other houses, visitors sometimes were treated to chamber-music concerts and displays of some of the finest an-

tiques in the South, but the general public saw little of this heritage.

Hanes says the turning point was the establishment of the city's Arts Council in 1949 -- first in the nation and model for 3,000 similar organizations now spread from coast to coast. The council was backed by a group of citizens who wanted to end Winston-Salem's cultural void, and they went to work with a fury.

Well-planned fund drives raised money for old and new arts organizations. A regional gallery of contemporary arts was created. A major university, Wake Forest, was persuaded to move to the area from Wake Forest, N.C. The North Carolina School of the Arts -- which the Times of London calls "probably the best" such institution in the U.S. -- was established here after 1 million dollars was raised in 48 hours.

Some of the most important support came from the old families and businesses. Reynolda House, once the home of Richard J. Reynolds, founder of the tobacco company that bears his name, was transformed into a museum of American art. The manor house of industrialist James G. Hanes became the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, where the works of regional artists are displayed. Millions of dollars to finance these and other institutions have been donated over the years by firms such as Reynolds, Hanes and the Wachovia Bank.

The results have surprised even the most ardent supporters of revitalization. Musicians, painters, dancers and writers are flocking to the city, and its influence is beginning to be felt worldwide.

James Houlik, one of the world's foremost saxophonists, lives here. So does composer Robert Suderburg, chancellor of the North Carolina School of the Arts. Area residents also include actress Rosemary Harris and ballerina Mimi Paul.

Both inside and outside the region, Winston-Salem-trained artists have made their mark. The School of the

Arts has produced designers contributing to productions of the Bolshoi and Metropolitan operas; actors such as Thomas Hulce, who are stars on Broadway and in Hollywood, and dancers in companies from San Francisco to Stuttgart. Said Lincoln Kirstein of the New York Ballet: "Our best-trained dancers come from the North Carolina School of the Arts."

Artist Mackey Bane moved to the area from Illinois. "I came here," she says, "because this area has so many attractive qualities: A receptive audience, the presence of institutions like the School of the Arts and SECCA (Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art) and the nearness of so many artists. Artists like to communicate with each other."

In 1975, Bane bought an old wreck of a house in the Crystal Towers area on a hill at the edge of downtown. Many years ago, the neighborhood was fashionable. But after the post-World War II rush to the suburbs, Crystal Towers fell on hard times.

"There were lots of robberies, and drunks lived all over the place," she recalls. "But I needed lots of space, and the house was cheap. So I spent three years tearing the house down and putting it together again."

Now, her two-story frame home, set apart from her neighbors by one of her paintings on the front exterior, is part of a handsomely restored community.

"It's a wonderful place to live," says Bane. "People really care about each other."

Strong Citizen Support

The presence of so many creative artists also has had a profound effect on the lives of other citizens. Performances of the Winston-Salem Symphony and the Little Theatre often are sold out, and the city ranks among the highest in the nation for per capita support of the arts. More than 6,000 residents contributed to the Winston Square project -- over 10 percent of the family units in the city.

Typical of residents who have been influenced by the changes is machinist Mitchell Shore, 27, who had virtually no contact with cultural offerings until a few years ago, when a next-door neighbor took him to a play at Wake Forest.

"I was amazed by it," he says. "I started going more and more, and now I see almost every play that's offered. I even went to New York last spring and took in three plays. It's a growing part of my life, and to tell you the truth, we're very fortunate to have all this available here."

Occasionally, complaints are heard that too much attention is paid to the arts. Some blacks, in particular, argue that more time and money ought to be devoted to tackling problems such as providing better housing and jobs for the poor. Although Winston-Salem's worst neighborhoods are paradises compared with many big-city ghettos, hundreds of residents live in areas such as Liberty-Patterson, where the plumbing often doesn't work and crime is a worry. Part of that neighborhood is slated to be razed for downtown development, but some citizens fear they will be no better off in other neighborhoods they can afford. About 30 percent of the population is black, with a substantial number living in integrated middle-income developments.

Thomas J. Elijah, Jr., executive director of the Winston-Salem Urban League, says there has been "some resentment of the arts. But those people don't realize that the arts will be the center of our downtown, and that if downtown dies, the whole city dies."

Another problem is that the city's cultural events are perceived by many blacks as white-oriented, and therefore of little interest to them. Several groups have been active both in sponsoring more shows with minority appeal and trying to interest more blacks in standard offerings.

"What we'd really like to see," explains Elijah, "are blacks and whites walking the

downtown streets together."

The Envy of Big Cities

As cultural activities have grown, so has Winston-Salem's reputation. The area's formula for spurring the arts has been studied by dozens of delegations from around the U.S. and abroad, and the community has become the envy of larger cities such as Atlanta and Charlotte.

Observes Edward A. Horrigan, Jr., chairman of the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company: "I'm a New Yorker, and when I came to Reynolds 2½ years ago, my friends said: 'You'll shrivel there. Since then, we've had dozens of friends visiting, and at the end of their visits, they don't want to go back.'"

Impressed with First January

Since I am interested in the Arts Management major here at Salem, I participated in an internship with the North Carolina Symphony in Raleigh. The internship did not include formal classroom sessions or evaluations. I was required to arrive at 9:30 a.m. and stay until 3:30 p.m. Most of my time was spent under the supervision of our office of community services. In relation to the 36 statewide symphony volunteer chapters, I had the opportunity to, work

with the Director of Education, help plan a major wine and cheese Pops concert, entertain guest conductors and soloists, attend all rehearsals and concerts, attend staff meetings, and interview staff members. Even though I have had very little experience with music, I feel like the four weeks I spent with the symphony were interesting as well as helpful in seeing how a non-profit organization involved in the arts is run.

By Janie Parker

Front Office Changes

Two administrative changes have been announced by Salem Academy and College, effective January 1.

James L. Barrett, director of institutional advancement, has assumed additional responsibilities in overseeing buildings and grounds, housekeeping, mail service, security and food services. His new title is director of institutional advancement and services.

Camille H. Hollis has been appointed director of Salem's \$12.2 million

campaign, the largest in the school's history. The Smith College graduate succeeds Ruth Funsett. Miss Hollis, a native of Massachusetts, is a former assistant to the director of the Winston-Salem Arts Council. She will, in her new post, supervise the final part of the first phase of the Salem Challenge.

Barrett, who came to Salem in 1973, is a graduate of Lynchburg College in Virginia and was director of development at Averett College in Danville, Va. for three years.

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