

# Business Briefs

## BUSINESS PROFILE

### Greeting card, florist business blossoms at Special Occasions

By ROBIN BARKSDALE  
Community News Editor

Ed and Miriam McCarter had always loved to send and collect greeting cards. But little did they ever suspect that that passion eventually would lead them out of the teaching profession and into business for themselves.

"I'm a card person, in fact, we both are," said Mrs. McCarter.

*"With both of us being education-oriented, we wanted to have books and to have all kinds of books. We started with reading materials. Now we get calls from people in California who don't have these kinds of things available. We try to keep up with whatever books are just coming out and we order them so that our customers can read about them and get them here."*

-- Miriam McCarter

"We like sending cards and we couldn't find any black cards anywhere. We went to the library to look up manufacturers that had black card lines. They started sending us cards and we started moonlighting cards among the people that we were working with. Sometimes we'd come home at the end of the day and we would have sold \$100 worth of cards."

And the entrepreneurial wheels began to turn for the McCarters, who both were teachers in the local school system at the time. Through a newspaper ad, they came across a man who was

selling card racks. The McCarters visited the gentleman's home and discovered that he actually had owned his own card shop in Mount Airy but that his poor health had forced him to shut down his operation.

"He didn't just have card racks, he had a full stock in his basement," Mrs. McCarter said. "We bought all the stuff. Then it

ended up in my basement."

The next step for the McCarters, who still were working full time, was to find a building from which they could market their supplies. They began in one of the smaller buildings in Jetway Shopping Center.

Their customer list grew but many of those clients suggested that the pair offer flowers for sale as well. The only problem, Mrs. McCarter said, was that they knew nothing about being florists. But she offhandedly was mentioning their dilemma with a co-worker and discovered that that same individual was a trained designer. The co-worker joined the

McCarters in the business, Special Occasions.

Mrs. McCarter began attending design classes to become more familiar with the floral business. When the co-worker left the business, Mrs. McCarter was prepared to handle the florist end on her own.

Today, Special Occasions is three businesses in one. The store offers a full-line florist and bridal service, a book store stocked with all types of black books and a line of church supplies.

The book store in Special Occasions offers books by the more popular Afro-American authors such as Maya Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks and Langston Hughes. But what makes the shop unique is its offering of black books on nearly every subject imaginable. It also features the hard-to-find books by black authors that usually have to be ordered and also books that now are out of print.

Lining the shelves at Special Occasions are such black books as "Delta Sigma Theta: In Search of Sisterhood," "Black Folks' Guide to Making Big Money in America," "Getting Black Folks to Sell," "Black Life in Corporate America," "Africa News Cookbook," "Tears for Ashan," "Fire in My Bones" and "Troubling Biblical Waters." Special Occasions also has stocked "I Dream A World," one of the best-selling black books currently on the market.

The McCarters' collection of books by, for and about blacks fills the section of their store that



Ed and Miriam McCarter have turned their love of greeting cards and books into a viable business at Special Occasions.

once was a building housing a separate business. The collection is a special source of pride for the McCarters.

"With both of us being education-oriented, we wanted to have books and to have all kinds of books," said Mrs. McCarter. "We started with reading materials. Now we get calls from people in California who don't have these kinds of things available. We try to keep up with whatever books are just coming out and we order them so that our customers can read about them and get them here."

Mrs. McCarter said that her husband is a "born salesman" so that when the two decided to leave the teaching profession to open their own business, she wasn't as apprehensive as she might

of been. And while she admits that she occasionally misses teaching, she is content to do without the "extras" that came along with the job.

"I miss teaching but I don't miss all the tangential kinds of things that go with it. And you can't teach without the tangential things," she said. "My husband has always been a salesman. Ed is an entrepreneur, he has an entrepreneur's mind. Even when he was teaching, he sold cars, insurance, Amway. He's a born salesman. I'm not as assertive as he is but I guess we have a blend of the business and the humanitarian. We find it challenging to just stay ahead."

Being husband and wife and business partners as well can also be challenging, Mrs. McCarter said.

"It's hard sometimes but you

must separate your personal life from your work day," she said.

"But it's the same with your job. You have to leave your personal life at home. You don't bring it to the office. What we've learned to do, and what we do, is to separate our lives. We have our separate interests. You just can't mix them together 24 hours every day. It's not eventually grating on another's nerves. But I play tennis or go shopping or travel. He's interested in, so it's well."

Mrs. McCarter said she is currently looking into expanding their business and are considering making their shop more accessible to the students at Winston-Salem State University.

### Hair by Tomi is Minority Business of the Month

By C.B. HAUSER  
Special to the Chronicle

Hair by Tomi Inc. was named the Minority Business of the Month at the meeting of the East Area Council of the greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce held last Thursday.

The award is sponsored by the East Area Council in conjunction with Stouffer Winston Plaza Hotel and is awarded monthly to an area minority business.

To be eligible for the award, the business selected must be in a growth position. Among other criteria, the business must be professional, have a good business attitude and be involved in community activities.

Hair by Tomi Inc. is owned and operated by Thomasene Richard and is located in the Northside Shopping Center. It was opened in July 1985 and incorporated in 1988. The business has grown in five years from a two-chair shop annexed to a home to a five-chair salon providing a full range of services and employing a staff of five.

Prior to opening her own salon, Mrs. Richard had more than 20 years of experience in shops and



Thomasene Richard, owner-operator of Hair by Tomi Inc., displays a plaque won by her salon as, from left, Sunny Jewel, vice president of membership of the Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce, James Grace, chair of the East Winston Community Development Corp., and Tom Marelo, general manager of the Stouffer Winston Plaza Hotel, look on.

hair salons around the world as part of the Air Force and Army exchange program.

Monthly winners receive a plaque, a photo and articles in the *Chronicle* and the Chamber's

newsletter and dinner for two at the Stouffer. Winners also are eligible for the Business of the Year Award.

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