

Winston-Salem State Choir Recognized as "Ambassadors of Excellence"

Special to the Chronicle

One semester hour of credit for five, 50-minute classes each week may not seem like much of a payoff, but to members of the Winston-Salem State University Choir the other rewards are well worth it, says D'Walla Simmons Burke, the choir's director.

That includes being recognized by Chancellor Cleon F. Thompson Jr. as "Ambassadors of Excellence."

"These 30 young people give up a lot to be in the choir," Thompson said. "While most of our students are enjoying spring break, the choir is on the road, traveling by bus along the east coast, to promote WSSU. Music has a way of touching people and, believe me, when you listen to our choir you've been touched — inspired, actually."

This spring, Burke and the entourage performed in Newark, Montclair and East Orange in New Jersey; Brooklyn, N.Y.; Washington, D.C.; Richmond and Danville, Va.; and in Charlotte and Henderson. The tour always ends with a concert on campus. The choir also presents an annual Christmas concert, a popular attraction.

"The choir is an excellent recruiter," says Burke. "We always try to include performances at high

schools — mini-concerts. This year, we had two or three in each city we visited. We also reserve time after the concert to talk to potential students."

The choir has been able to attract top-flight students over the last year through a new scholarship program that provides up to full tuition, on a renewable basis.

"It has really worked," Burke says. "I can be a little more particular in the type and caliber of students we're looking for. We not only get talented students, but we also get scholars."

"Choir members are told right up front that the main reason for attending Winston-Salem State is to get their degrees," she adds.

Even without the draw of scholarships, the choir has successfully competed and performed with some of the best choirs in the country. In 1991, WSSU won the African-American Negro Spiritual Festival in Cincinnati, picking up a trophy and \$1,000 by edging out choirs from Tennessee State, South Carolina State and Florida A&M University.

And last spring, the choir was invited to perform at the National American Black Musician Caucus in Nashville.

The director herself was honored, also last spring, by her alma mater, Hampton University, as an outstanding musician. In a performance that evening, Burke conducted both the WSSU and Hampton choirs.

After receiving an undergraduate degree from Hampton in 1983,

Burke earned a master's degree in choral conducting at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is now working on a doctorate in higher education administration at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

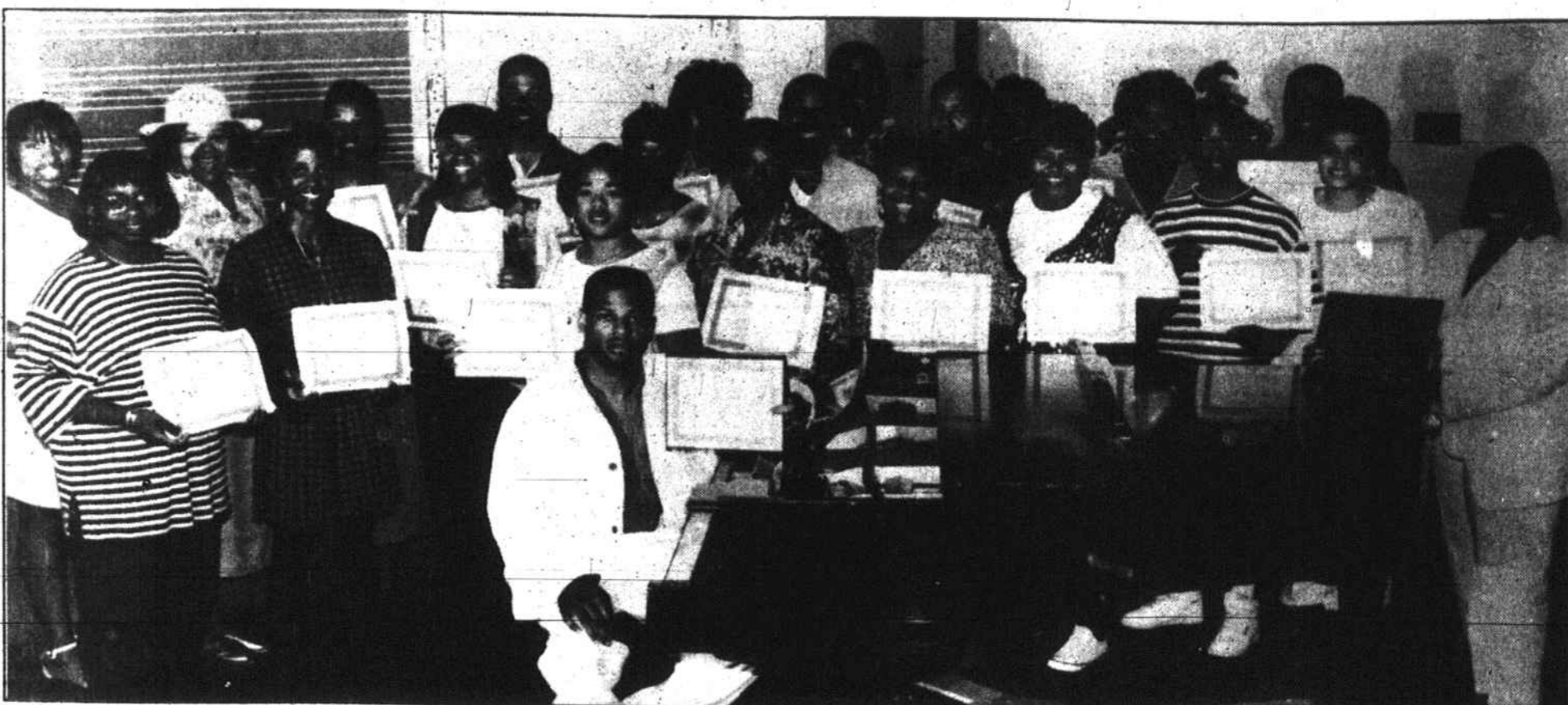
Burke joined the WSSU faculty in 1989, coming from Voorhees's

College in Demark, S.C., where she was an assistant professor of music and director of choirs for three years. While there, Voorhees's choir was invited to sing for Pope John Paul II during his visit to the University of South Carolina in Columbia.

"We were one of two African-

American choirs to be invited," says Burke, who has shaken hands with the Pope.

"Only seven of our choir members here are music majors," she adds. "They sing for sheer joy of singing."



D'Walla Simmons Burke (r) and choir members each display certificates from the chancellor recognizing them as "Ambassadors of Excellence."

Local Woman Recognized for Service With Youths



Gaynell Walters

Gaynell Walters of Winston-Salem has been awarded a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential in recognition of outstanding work with young children. The credential was awarded by the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition in Washington, D.C., which represents the early childhood profession.

CDA is the only major national effort to improve child care by evaluating and recognizing the skills of individuals providing care. The first credential was awarded 20 years ago, and now 46 states plus the District of Columbia include CDA in their child care licensing regulations.

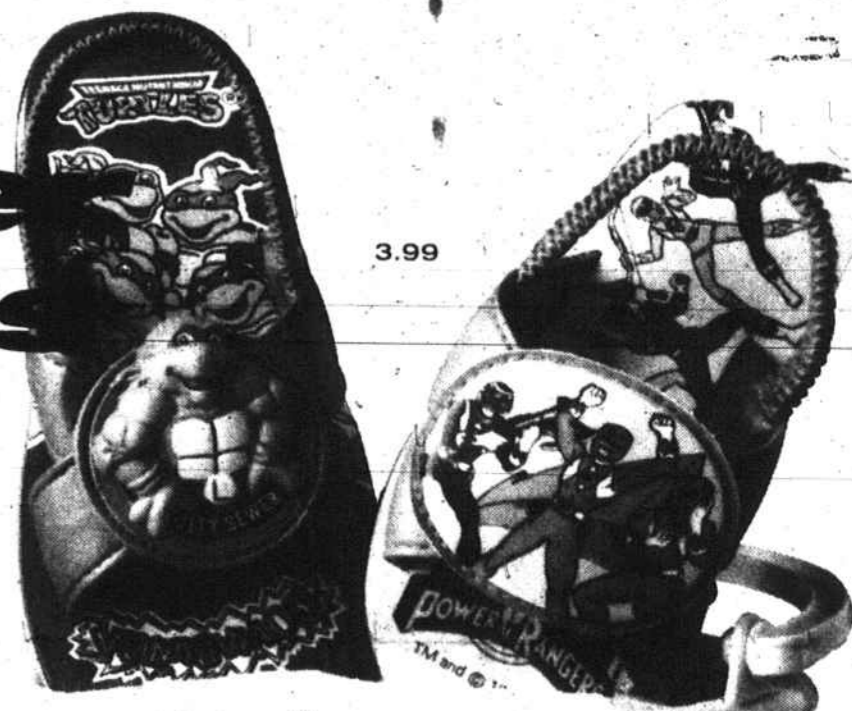
Parents who use child care are especially concerned today about their children's welfare. With this in mind, as part of the CDA assessment process, every candidate for the CDA credential is observed working with young children by an early childhood professional. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate the ability to work with families to develop children's physical and intellectual capabilities in a safe and healthy learning environment.

The CDA credential is having a positive effect on the quality of child care. Its impact is evident in center-based care as well as family child care, the most common form of care for children under 5 years old.

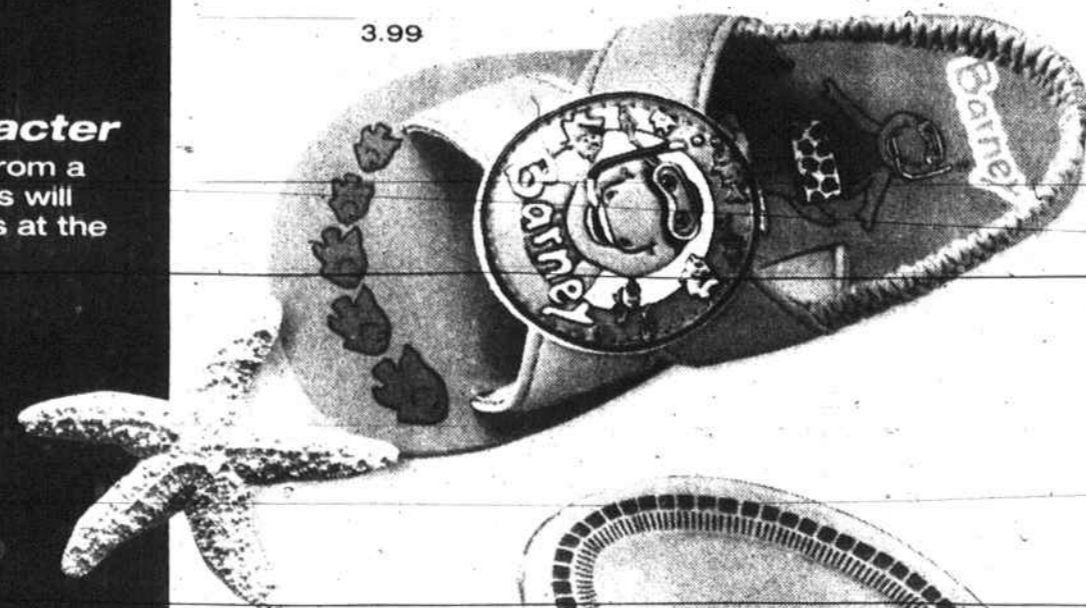
Child care staff and parents wanting information on CDA should write the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition at 1341 G. Street NW, Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20005-3105. Or call (202) 265-9090 or 1-800-424-4310.



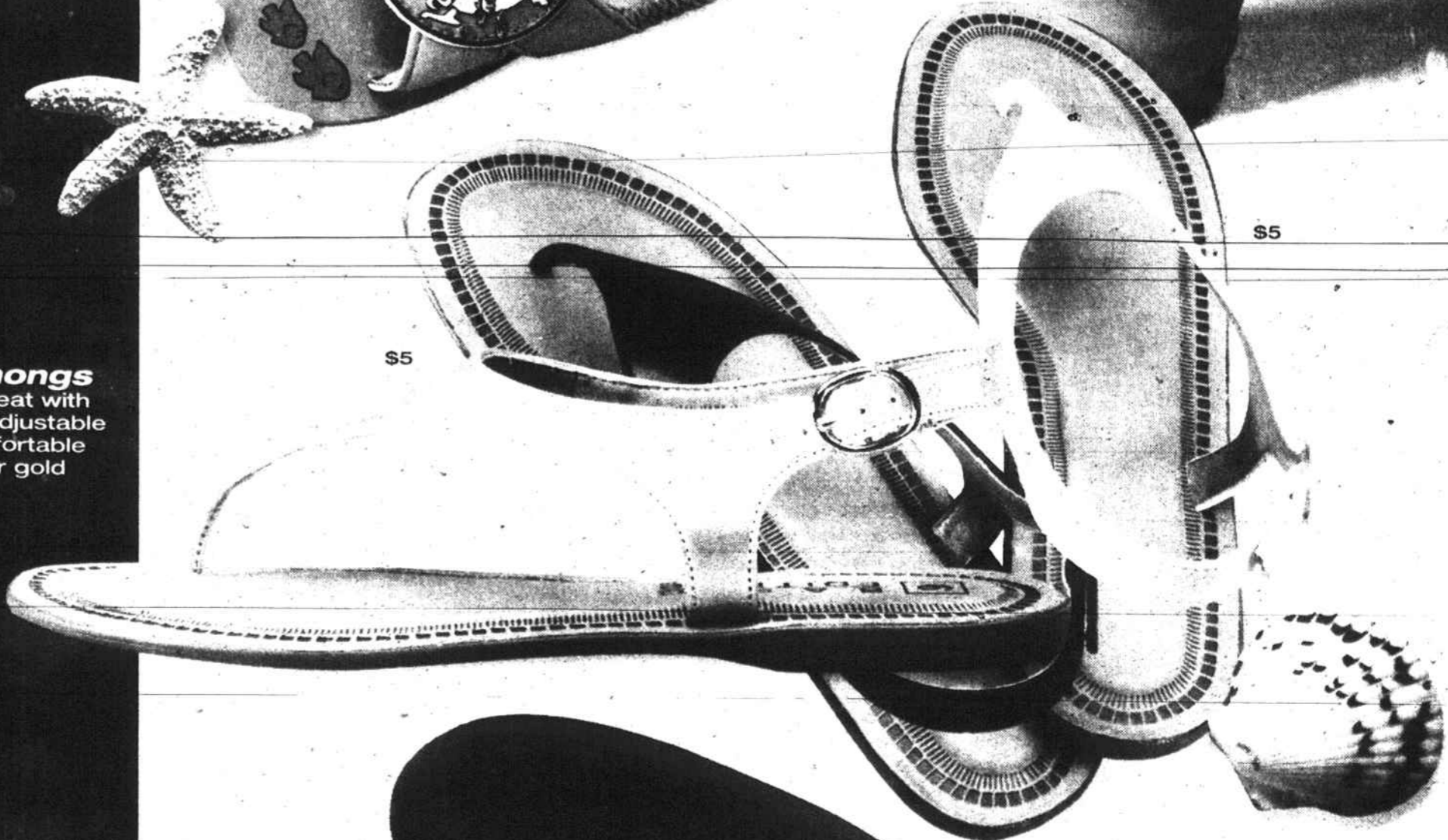
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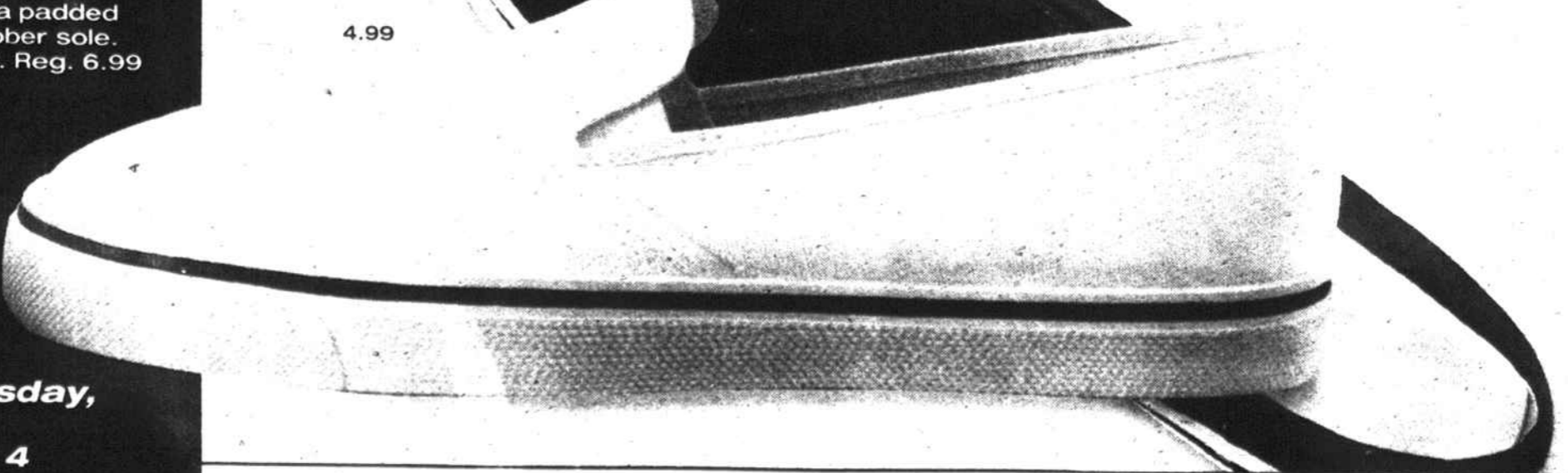
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