



Photo by Jane Ouliso

culture has blossomed into this tree that has fruit for everyone," he said.

#### The moon and the stars?

Even as Hamlin was leading a contingent of celebrities in a gallant midnight march through the streets of downtown for the festival's closing ceremony, a buzz was in the air that the curtain had fallen for the final time on the National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem.

Sources who wanted to remain nameless said that representatives from Charlotte liked what they saw at this year's festival, so much so that the city is prepared to offer Hamlin the moon to go along with his theater festival stars.

Hamlin has made it no secret that he would like more financial support for the festival from the city of Winston-Salem. But support has not been as forthcoming as festival organizers would have liked.

During the city's most recent budget talks, the festival was awarded its largest single financial contribution from the city ever — \$100,000 — but only after the black Democrats on the Board of Aldermen nicked-and-dimed their way to that figure.

The award was \$50,000 less than Hamlin had requested.

"There's always more that can be done," said Alderman Nelson Malloy Friday night as he enjoyed some of the activities downtown. "If we are striving for perfection and trying to be the best that we can be, there is always room for improvements. We should not rest

on our laurels."

But with bigger and flashier North Carolina cities reportedly willing to put their money where their mouths are, many fear the festival will go the way of the CIAA Basketball Tournament, which will be held in Raleigh next year after a six-year stay here.

During a rare breather one day before the festival wrapped up, Hamlin said he wanted to keep the festival in Winston-Salem, but he said he cannot assure residents here that it will return in 2001.

"I can assure the people that I want to be here. Whether that is realistic or not depends very much on the funds we are able to raise from our local constituents," he said.

Hamlin said over the next two years he will continue to lobby for support for the festival from the city as well as corporate entities. He said this year's festival was \$50,000 to \$75,000 short, but, he says, "if you're going to go into debt this is worth going into debt for."

Regardless, Hamlin said that fans have told him that the 1999 festival was the best yet. He tends to agree. He says the stars, the crowds and especially the hundreds of devoted festival volunteers were great.

"The volunteers were absolutely crucial to our operation. All the different aspects that they served save us lots of money," he said. "If we had to pay our volunteers we could not afford to (do) it."

Preparations for the 2001 festival have already begun, Hamlin said, although the location of the



Photo by T. Kevin Walker

Larry Leon Hamlin talks with Olosopé Oyelaran in the lobby of the Adam's Mark.

festival may be somewhat fuzzy. He said the 2001 festival will continue with "fringe" productions, stage productions by college students which made their debut at this year's festival.

The next festival will also feature more hip-hop-oriented theatrical productions, Hamlin said.

Festival organizers see nothing but more success by making a serious effort to entice young people into the fold.

"(Hip-hop) is the youth culture," Hamlin said.

As scores of people began to pour out of the Adam's Mark early last Sunday morning, there was great excitement amid the

mass exodus, even though the festival had come to an end.

Between the laughs and the sound of footsteps, people could be overheard talking about "the next time" or "2001" as they made mental plans for the next round of plays and parties.

But only Hamlin knows whether the party will be here, 60 miles away in Charlotte or in one of a growing handful of other anxious cities.

"I want to stay here," Hamlin said. "It just means we have to find things more accessible to us, and I know that is a difficult thing to ask with a city like this, but nonetheless we are going to ask them anyway."

## NBTF

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The site was also home to several outdoor concerts last week and a massive block party Saturday.

Actor Hal Williams of "227" fame and "A Time to Kill" actress Jonea Stewart made frequent midnight visits to the eatery. They feasted on soul food like macaroni and cheese, deep-fried fish and ribs.

One of the vendors at the eatery constantly referred to Williams as Lester, the character he played on the popular sitcom. One night the vendor jokingly asked Williams about the whereabouts of his television wife Mary.

"Mary's at home," he responded with a smile.

Nightly celebrity receptions provided a more structured way for the public to meet celebrities. Fans formed long lines each night in a huge ballroom in the Adam's Mark and waited their turn to meet the stars, who sat at tables in a roped-off section of the room.

Actress Loretta Devine attended one of the receptions, but she opted not to sit behind the rope like her many actor pals. Devine, who starred in "Waiting to Exhale" and "The Preacher's Wife," sat at one of the tables provided for the general public, listening intently as a local band brought down the house.

A slimmed-down Devine went unnoticed, even when she took to the dance floor with several fans. But when word got out, people quickly formed a beeline to the actress' table, where she signed autographs, gave out hugs and posed for pictures.

Devine said it was her first time in Winston-Salem. She came from Wilmington — where she is shooting "Freedom Song" with Danfey Glover — to see the plays "Stepping Into Tomorrow" and "The Trial of One Short-sighted Black Woman."

When asked why she chose to sit with the public and not other celebrities, Devine answered with her trademark smile and distinctive voice.

"I don't like that rope thing," she said. "Everyone here is really great and they really want to talk to you... That's what we are here for. It's not like you're at the supermarket or at dinner."

Even during the interview, Devine took a few seconds to acknowledge her fans. She burst into laughter as one lady came up and imitated her famous "I hope he is not watching me" walk from "Exhale."

Devine applauded the city for staging such a festival. She said that arts events of any kind are a "good thing," especially for a city's pocketbook.

"It boosts everything," she said.

Her appearance here was an unbilled and unexpected surprise, but Devine said that perhaps next time she'll play more of an active role at the festival.

"Hopefully, I will (come back to Winston-Salem), and I'll perform next time," she said.

Actor Renald White was seen all over downtown last week in between his performances as the lead character in the play "Julius Caesar Set in Africa."

At well over 6 feet tall, White was hard to miss. His face is more famous than his name. Starting as a model in the 1970s, White became one of the first black models to grace the cover of GQ Magazine.

He has since appeared in numerous television series and theatrical works. White was among the masses looking on during one of Otesha's late night performances last week.

Though it was nearing 2 o'clock in the morning, White and the others showed no signs of slowing down.

"I never experienced anything like this," he said, the drums beating behind him. "I think this is by far a unique and one-of-a-kind situation in the world. I've been to

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