

'There she is'

Photos by T. Kevin Walker
Akeisha Gaither of Winston-Salem State University waves to the crowd after being crowned Miss Bovanti Midway Classic last week. Below, left to right, Deshelia Hall, third runner-up, Kenita Upchurch, first runner-up, and Chakila Merrick, second runner-up accept their flowers and sashes. Nineteen women from WSSU and North Carolina Central University participated in the pageant.



Robinson

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The two items Robinson took issue with relate to bonds that would have provided nearly \$2.5 million for parks and recreation and more than \$1 million for community and economic development. Robinson said the projects were too similar to items that were soundly rejected by city voters in a 1997 bond referendum.

Robinson — and many others who attended the meeting to oppose the issuance of the bonds — said passage of the bond package amounted to nullifying the results of an election.

"My colleagues are bound and determined to ignore the voters," Robinson said.

Robinson, who has distanced himself from the Republicans this year, attacked "the Republican Party" for not taking strong stances on issues like the issuance of two-thirds bonds and a 10-percent tax cut, which Robinson and Alderman Steve Whiton, also a Republican, proposed during budget talks earlier this year.

"The Republican Party is absent ... without leadership," Robinson said.

It is unclear whether Robinson was directing his comments toward the board's only other

Republican, Alderman Bob Northington, but an angry Northington laid into Robinson.

"...I'm sick and damn tired, personally, of Mr. Robinson talking down to everyone in the city and trying to run this place, and I pledge to you right here and now, from this day forward, that as long as I'm on this board (Robinson's) life will be just as miserable as I can possibly make it," said Northington, a 22-year veteran of the board.

Robinson did not respond to Northington's threat and sat silently for some time.

It is not the first time the two have engaged in verbal sparring. In May, mere weeks before Robinson moved no consideration on the June budget vote, Northington admonished Robinson for questioning Experiment in Self-Reliance Executive Director Twana Wellman about rumors of financial mismanagement at the agency.

Robinson claimed that he was being muzzled by not being able to question Wellman and others; he eventually stormed out of the meeting, which prompted Northington to say: "See you. Have a nice night"

The board agreed to hold a special meeting tonight to once again take up the issue of the two-

thirds bonds. The next regularly scheduled board meeting is not until Nov. 1, but city staffers warned board members that if they waited until then it may be too late to get the bonds approved this year by a state commission.

Alderman Joycelyn Johnson is banking on the successful passage of the bonds. She says money from the bonds will aid economic development efforts on the Liberty Street Corridor as well as other areas in dire need of improvements. But board members will not talk about specific projects until after the issue is voted on.

"There are some things that need to be done," Johnson said.

Johnson said she knew it was a possibility that the vote would be pushed back, although she is a bit dumbfounded as to why since many issues, involving the two-thirds bonds were hashed out in several committee meetings before Monday's meeting.

Though Johnson is confident that the bonds will be passed, she says the special meeting will affect something that is very valuable to her and other board members — time.

"Some things we just have to do in a timely fashion," Johnson said.

Today's meeting will be held at 5:15 p.m. at City Hall.

Performances

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took their bows for the final performance, all of Ashley's student population had seen the show, as well as several parents, School Board members and system administrators.

In all, 30 senior citizens were involved with the project, but only a handful of them participated in each performance.

The seniors sat in chairs during much of "Memories," while their fourth-grade partners stood beside them.

Miller and her assistant, Sarah Steel, provided the rhythm for the performances. The women read brief stories about an episode from the lives of one person in each of the senior/student duos.

The performers used their arms and hands to illustrate the stories of their partners as they were read. When it all came together — the words, the hand motions, the infectious energy of the performers — "Memories" became a memorable spectacle — part mime performance, part ballet.

One senior citizen's fondest memory dealt with the Christmas Eve regiment her family went through each year, which involved, among other things, making a cake.

As Miller read, a student went to work; first pouring imaginary ingredients into an imaginary bowl, and then, using both hands, stirring them with an imaginary spoon.

A story from the memory of one of the students told of her sadness as a beloved pet was hauled off to the county pound. The student's partner mimicked weeping for much of the story, wiping away invisible tears.

"It was just so much fun," a smiling Geneva Jeffrey said after she finished the last performance. Jeffrey, one of the seniors, said having the Ashley students at the Mount Zion center over the last few weeks was a pleasant experience and a welcome change of pace.

The performance bug has bitten Jeffrey hard; she says she'd love to perform again, preferably with the youngsters.

"I love the children; they were little dolls," she said. "There was no showing out or anything like that."

Terrion Stevenson and Mary Smith, two of the fourth-grade performers, had to pull double duty last week. In addition to the performances with the seniors, Terrion, Mary and their classmates had put on a separate performance: bringing the words of a popular children's book to life as Miller and Steel read. But the two youngsters said they liked working with the seniors the best.

"They were real nice to us," Terrion muttered from behind a timid smile. "It felt good to work with them."

Between giggles, Mary admitted she practiced her movements in front of a mirror every night.

"I also practiced how to bow," she said.

Many of the lessons the students learned from the seniors, and vice versa, did not make it into the play. The students were mystified as the seniors talked of going to out-houses and retrieving water from a well; the seniors were surprised that the youngsters still enjoyed a good game of hide-and-seek, a game that many of them played in their younger years.

The group collected many of the stories in a booklet version of "Memories," copies of which will

be made available to teachers at Ashley so that they can share it with their classes. In addition to stories, the booklet also features several pictures of the students and seniors together during their many hours of rehearsal.

"I have seen kids who were apprehensive and shy come out during this process," said Vonda Byrd-Flynt, the teacher of the fourth-grade class chosen for the performance.

Byrd-Flynt said the experience has also helped the students broaden their creative writing skills and fostered better interaction among the kids. Byrd-Flynt is looking into ways to keep the kinship between the students and the seniors going. The students may start writing regularly to their seniors or drop in to the center for visits every now and then, she said.

Miller said this year's residency ranks high on her list of favorites. She says she enjoys doing workshops with children; her young daughter, Alexandra, often travels with her and participates in performances. Storytelling is a form of art that also helps young people develop reading and writing skills, she said.

"They were very receptive to this," Miller said of the performers. "Everyone was excited every day, and they grasped the concept right away."

Ultimately, those involved in the project say, they hope that the children, especially, learned life lessons from the experience. They hope that they've learned things like not being afraid to talk to a person in a wheelchair — Steel and some of the seniors are wheelchair-bound — and that the elderly are just like everyone else — lessons that cannot be taught from a textbook or tested on an exam.

Bias

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of the N.C. Initiative to Reduce Underage Drinking will be shown at the Hanes Mall food court from 4-7 p.m.

Oct. 24 — City officials and area high school and college students will gather in the Hanes Mall food court for a special kickoff celebration at 2 p.m.

Oct. 25 — Drug awareness

display will be shown at Marketplace Mall.

Oct. 26 — Activist Lonise Bias will be the keynote speaker for the Coalition for Drug Abuse Prevention's Community Service Awards Ceremony. The event will be held in Wait Chapel on the campus of Wake Forest University.

For more information or to order free red ribbons to be worn during the week, call Leeanna Lee, 723-3784.

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