

# Restaurateur Ma' Chris passes away after illness

BY JAESON PITT  
THE CHRONICLE

The woman whose mouthwatering collard greens, chitterlings and homemade biscuits fed several generations of local people died Monday at Hospice. She was 85.

Christina Burton, affectionately known as Ma' Chris, ran several local restaurants for more than 50 years. Her best known eateries - Mama Chris' Soul Food Cafe and the Starlight Cafe - were known for their flavorful menus and wide selection of down-home favorites. At one point, Burton, who was born and raised in Newberry, S.C., had earned such a following that she operated two restaurants at once.

"She cooked from scratch; everything (was) fresh," said Burnelle Brown, 61, who began working for Ma' Chris at the age of 20. "For me... everything I learned, I learned totally from her."

The building that housed Burton's last restaurant is still standing on the corner of 18th and Liberty streets.

Never one to use a written recipe, Burton took many of her cooks under her angelic wings, coaching them in a motherly manner. Her son Willie Rogers of Oklahoma City, Okla., recalls her care, not only with food preparation, but people as well.

"When the (needs) didn't have money for the food, she gave it to them," he said.

Burton also catered events around town. Early on, she catered for Export Tobacco Co. out of the trunk of her car and was popular among employees of all races.

Burton was known for many dishes, but especially her fatback meat, corn bread, pinto beans, rice and stewed meat, barbecue ribs, oxtails, salmon croquettes, and all kinds of cobblers. Ma' Chris' personal favorite was cabbage and pigs' feet.



Ma' Chris at one of her recent birthday celebrations.

Her friends and family remember her as a straightforward individual who said what was on her mind.

"She didn't beat around the bush. She had a strong personality," said her cousin Jeri Moss. Her grandson Chris Burton remembers the Christmases at the cafe when she used to give the kids 50-cent pieces, whether they were family or not.

Friends say her spirit was as memorable as her cooking. From always identifying people in the street once she met them, to beating thieves off for trying to rob her cafe and home, she was an unforgettable character.

Burton was an active and longtime member of Shiloh Baptist Church.

"(She) loved people. (She was) a very outgoing person with a great personality," said Doris Hunt, another Shiloh member.

She was the president of several missions, her most notable being the Queen Elizabeth Auxiliary, where she organized women in the congregation for community service projects.

A memorial service for Mama Chris (Christina) Burton will be held Saturday at 1 p.m. at Shiloh Baptist Church on 12th Street and Highland Ave. The Rev. Paul Lowe will officiate. Visitation will be from noon to 1 p.m. The family advises mourners to come early due to the amount of people who are expected to attend the funeral.



Photos by Kevin Walker

Famed attorney Joseph D. Johnson, a 1973 graduate of Winston-Salem State, encourages his fellow alumni to give to the school.

## Alumni

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five years. The student population has grown by about 70 percent since 2000, when Chancellor Harold Martin came on board. The school has kept up with the growth with new buildings, programs, initiatives and increased faculty might.

It has paid off. For four straight years, U.S. News and World Report Magazine ranked the school No. 1 on its list of the Top Public Southern Comprehensive Colleges (Bachelor's Category). This year, though, WSSU fell to No. 2 on the list. Martin believes, in part, the slip occurred because the University of South Carolina-Aiken, which took over the top spot, has a higher rate of alumni giving than WSSU.

But WSSU Rams are contributing more to the school than ever before. Officials estimate that there are about 12,200 living WSSU alumni. In 2000, only 3 percent of them made financial contributions to the school. That percentage has risen over the years. By the end of the capital campaign, the percentage should be at least 12 percent.

Many of the alumni who spoke at the kickoff - which was held beneath a large white canopy in front of the student union - came close to accusing alumni who do not give back of something close to treason. Joseph D. Johnson, a 1973 graduate, told alumni to remember WSSU when they get into their luxury cars and walk into their swank homes.

"You did not get that all by



Chancellor Harold Martin helps Catherine Hart applauds.

yourself," said Johnson, a Kansas attorney considered one of the best in the nation.

Johnson said he owes his success to Winston-Salem State. Johnson, who grew up dirt poor in a home without indoor plumbing, became the first person in his family to attend college.

"This institution embraced a poor kid like me," he said.

In pure lawyer style, Johnson argued during the kickoff that every WSSU alum should give \$100 for every year since his or her graduation. He start-

ed the ball rolling with \$3,200 of his money for the 32 years since his graduation. He then took the mic around to several people in the audience so that they too could announce their commitments.

Hart knows that not every alumnus is in a position to give \$3,200. But she thinks everybody can give something. Her hope is that alumni surpass their goal and that alumni support will continue, even when the capital campaign ceases.

"We need to lead by example," she said.



File Photo

Performers prepare to hit the stage during the 2003 Fiesta. This year's Hispanic cultural celebration will be held on Saturday as part of Race Equality Week.

# Forums and awards banquet highlight Race Equality Week

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The annual Human Relations Awards Banquet and a series of forums exploring religious, ethnic and racial relations will be held this month to help citizens learn, discuss and experience other cultures during Race Equality Week, Sept. 26-30.

The banquet will feature Charlie Richman, a professor of psychology at Wake Forest University, and student human relations award winners in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools. The banquet will be held Sept. 29 from 6:30 - 8 p.m. at the Benton Convention Center. Tickets cost \$25 and are available by calling 727-2429.

Other events to celebrate Race Equality Week, all sponsored or co-sponsored by the Winston-Salem Human Relations Department, include:

• "Islamic Identity and Cultural Imagination: The example of Nigeria and Senegal," Friday, Sept. 23, at 11 a.m. in the Williams Auditorium at Winston-Salem State University, featuring Cheikh Anta Babou, professor of history at Pennsylvania State University.

• African-American/Hispanic Race Relations Forum, Friday, Sept. 30, 6 to 7:30 p.m. at Parkland High School. Students from Winston-Salem/Forsyth County high schools will discuss their perspectives on the state of racial relations.

• African-American/Hispanic Race Relations Forum, Friday, Sept. 30, 6 to 7:30 p.m. at Southside Baptist Church, 401 E. Sprague St. Leaders of the African-American and Hispanic communities will discuss current events that affect their respective communities.

• A peaceful march from the intersection of Waightown Street and Old Lexington Road to the Community Mosque, noon on Sept. 24, followed by lectures and singing at Reynolds Park Recreation Center, 2450 Reynolds Park Road.

Free African food and drinks will be served.

• Student Race Relations Forum, Tuesday, Sept. 27, 6 to 8 p.m. at Parkland High School. Students from Winston-Salem/Forsyth County high schools will discuss their perspectives on the state of racial relations.

• African-American/Hispanic Race Relations Forum, Friday, Sept. 30, 6 to 7:30 p.m. at Southside Baptist Church, 401 E. Sprague St. Leaders of the African-American and Hispanic communities will discuss current events that affect their respective communities.

For more information or to learn more about the Human Relations Department, call 727-2429.

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