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THE CHRONICLE

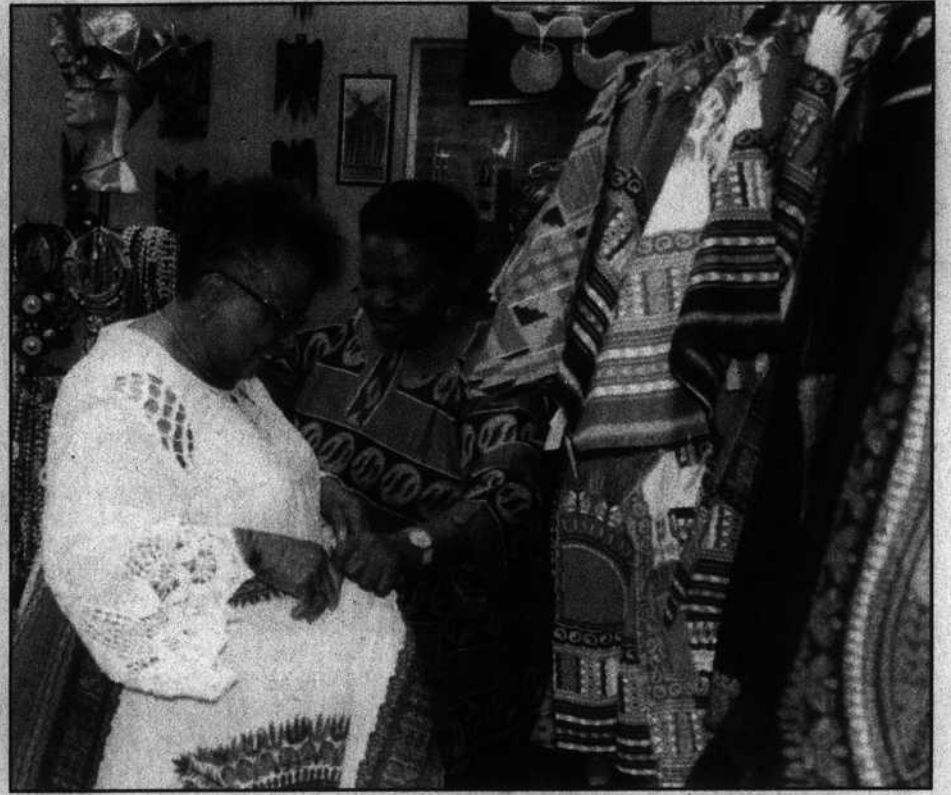
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NBTF: We're here!



Comedian Michael Colyar got things started with a few jokes.

Photos by Alphonso Abbott Jr.



Purity Ruchugo helps Ava Edwards-Idehen try on a dress at Umoja African Crafts Store on Tuesday.

Photos by Todd Luck

Stars kick off National Black Theatre Festival

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

The 2017 National Black Theatre Festival started off with a bang on Monday night as more than 800 people gathered inside the newly renovated Benton Convention Center for NBTF Opening Night Gala.

Highlighted by an awards ceremony that honors some of the biggest and brightest names in the business for their contributions to theater, the star-studded event is always one of the most popular during the weeklong celebration of black art, and culture. The event also gives locals and tourists a chance to see stars they've seen

on TV and on the big screen in person. While watching stars like Louis Gossett Jr., Angela Robinson, Debbie Allen, and Andre De Shields, make their way inside William Herring was all smiles. Herring who has volunteered with the NBTF since 1989 said what he enjoys most about the bi-annual festival is the spirit that it brings to the city.

"Seeing the stars is always great but what is most important is the energy of all the people here. Everyone is like family and you get a good vibe from everyone here," he said. "That's what it's all about. Just coming together and having a good time."

See NBTF on A4

NBTF expected to have major economic impact

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

The biennial National Black Theatre Festival is back and its impact on Winston-Salem is bigger than ever.

The impact is expected to be larger than in 2015, when the weeklong festival of plays was estimated to have had a \$7.5 million to \$11 million impact on the local economy. About 50,000 people are expected to visit the city this week and fill more than 3,000 hotel rooms.

Nigel Alston, executive director of the North Carolina Black Repertory Company, which holds the festival, said most of the rooms are booked before the festivals line-up of shows and celebrities is even announced. He said the sheer volume of quality shows and the hospitality of more than 1,000 volunteers creates an experience that keeps people coming back every two years.

"It's always exciting: the diversity of it, the types of shows, professional theater," said Alston.

"It's just an exciting time in terms of black theater here."

Mayor Allen Joines said Winston-Salem is always excited to host the

festival and welcome its visitors.

"It's a real treasure for our community that offers our own citizens the opportunity to experience theater. It brings a lot of visitors to our city who spend a lot of money and then it also brings national attention to Winston-Salem



from all around the world," said Joines.

Visit Winston-Salem President Richard Geiger said that it's the city's largest event based on the number of people it brings in. He said those visitors will have many new restaurants and amenities to enjoy as the city has grown.

"What's great is that they come every two years and there's always something new and exciting for them to visit and see while they're here," said Geiger.

Visitors have been greeted by many new

attractions downtown. The Benton Convention Center is newly renovated. Liberty Street now hosts new eateries like Camel City BBQ Factory and Crafted: The Art of the Taco along with a new gallery and headquarters for Arts For Arts Sake that stands alongside its ARTivity on the Green park. Kimpton Cardinal Hotel on Main Street now offers rooms and restaurants.

Old favorites of theatergoers still remain, like cultural gift shop Body and Soul on Trade Street. Down the street, the popular restaurant Sweet Potatoes has moved to a new, larger location with outdoor seating and a new Miss Ora's Kitchen, which serves panfried chicken, next door.

Downtown businesses have expanded hours and additional staff to help with the increased customers they see during the festival. Purity Ruchugo, founder of Umoja African Crafts Store on Trade Street, described it as "overtime plus." She said the amount of customers during the festival continues to increase.

"When they leave Winston, they go back with a feeling that it's a place

See Economy on A4

Local people honored at star-studded gala

BY TIMOTHY RAMSEY
THE CHRONICLE

The National Black Theatre Festival (NBTF) is in town once again. Thousands of people from across the country are pouring into the city to enjoy the week-long celebration. To begin the week, the awards gala was held and four local residents took home awards.

*Mabel Robinson, who received a Living Legend Award, retired as artistic director of the North Carolina Black Repertory Company (NCBRC) at the tail end of 2015. While there she helped cre-

ate magic on stage serving as both director and choreographer for a number of successful productions. The Savannah, GA native is a graduate of the Julliard School of Music.

"I want to say thank you so much for bestowing this honor upon me because I am truly grateful for it," Robinson said after receiving her award. "I feel truly blessed and I am humbled by it as well."

*The Theatre Arts and Humanitarian Award was awarded to Wilbert T. Jenkins. He has long supported the N.C. Black

See Local on A4

Barber calls map ruling 'major victory'

BY CASH MICHAELS
FOR THE CHRONICLE

The outgoing president of the N.C. NAACP is elated that the Republican-led legislature is being forced to redraw its unconstitutional legislative voting maps by

Sept. 1.

"Forcing the legislature to redraw lines with mandatory court oversight is a major victory," Bishop William Barber II, said in a statement after a three-judge U.S. District court panel ruled Monday that the N.C.

General Assembly had to redraw 28 of 170 legislative districts from the 2011 redistricting map because of racial gerrymandering.

"[This is] more reason why the General Assembly should not pass anymore legislation because they are an

unconstitutionally constituted racially created legislature that fundamentally violates our democratic principles."

Indeed, the plaintiffs in *Coyington v. North Carolina* were certainly hoping that



Bishop Barber

See Map on A5

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