

Under New Owners

Historic Excelsior Club Celebrates 1st Anniversary

The Excelsior Club, the Southeast's oldest social establishment and believed to be the only one of its kind in the country to be designated an historic property, marks its first full year of operation under new ownership this month.

The Excelsior Club was founded in 1944 by the late Jimmie McKee as a "country club" and "social establishment" for black professionals who were locked out of Charlotte's social mainstream by segregation.

Charlotte businessmen Ken Koontz and Phil Hatchett bought the Club from McKee last November. McKee sold the Club to his "adopted sons" because of his failing health.

While holding true to their promise of running the Excelsior Club in the same style and manner that made it popular throughout the Southeast and along the Eastern Seaboard, Koontz and Hatchett have added the phrase "The Historic Tradition" to the Club logas, and successfully waged a campaign to have the two-story stucco building at 921 Beatties Ford Road recommended for designation as a local historic property.

Koontz and Hatchett have also expanded the Club's membership base to more than 1,500 members.

"We sought to attract a younger adult clientele while also maintaining the support of those persons who over the many years made the Excelsior Club great," says Koontz, President of HKL, Inc., which is the holding company that owns the building and property.

"My partner, Phil, has had prior experience in owning and operating a Club, and together we bring separate skills that complement our operations of the Excelsior," Koontz adds.

"We welcome all groups



PHIL HATCHETT, LEFT, POSES

...With business partner Ken Koontz

and individuals to become a part of the Excelsior," says Hatchett.

"Ken and I believe that the programs we have added, plus continuing to work with the business that Jimmie had already established over the years make this a well-rounded social establishment with something for everyone," concludes Hatchett.

"There are about 15 clubs and organizations that meet at the Excelsior Club weekly or monthly. Our rates for those meetings are competitive and perhaps substantially lower than anywhere else in town, plus we provide refreshments," says Koontz.

In addition to the regular meetings, the Excelsior Club has hosted more than two dozen wedding receptions over the past year. Other activities have included annual club parties, political receptions and meetings, and the usual congenial atmosphere

where friends gather to relax and talk over the day's activities.

The Excelsior continues its popular "TGIF Affair" which starts at five o'clock on Friday evenings. This is the single most popular event of the week when many of Charlotte's young professionals gather to cap off their week of work and "ring in the weekend."

"TGIF also offers plenty opportunities for networking among established residents and provides a chance for newcomers to meet the right people who,

in many instances, are able to help them adjust to this new environment," says Koontz.

The most recent innovation is a "Tuesday Shrimp and Oyster Bar." Excelsior members gather about six o'clock for the steamed oysters, which are a favorite of Hatchett's, the one who came up with the idea. Each week the Club features a "surprise dish." The "surprise" so far has included shrimp creole, crabs, and frog legs.

The Excelsior plans a gala anniversary party to

be announced later. Meanwhile, the plans include continuing renovation of the building, which originally was a two-story frame house built in 1917.

As a private club, membership to the Excelsior Club is by invitation or application. All 1984-85 memberships expired on November 1, 1985, and Koontz says new membership cards are available for members who want to renew their memberships. All memberships are \$10 a year.

Koontz and Hatchett say they are most grateful for the support they have received and that they look forward to serving Charlotte as owners of the Excelsior Club for many years to come.

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