



One of Charlotte's best vocalists in recent memory showed up in the QC this week.

Maria Howell, jazz diva deluxe, was in town to catch up on old times and share the 411 with friends and fans alike. Fly thought girlfriend had 'bout dropped off the face of the planet, but noooo. Chick done upped and got hitched to **Louis Dukes**, a leatherneck stationed in Okinawa. If ya dunno where that is, use a map - it ain't in Dixie.

As for her career, Miz Howell is doing gigs across the Pacific and Asia and it seems as if the locals just can't get enough of that voice. There's talk of recording a CD and doing some acting out that way before the pair move stateside. Way to go, girlfriend! And come see us again, ya heah?

• Da bomb...Fly hears the fine folks down at the **Department of Social Services** are pretty fired up. According to DSS workers, some nut, probably a victim of welfare reform, threatened to blow the Freedom Drive location sky high.

Anyway, rather than announcing the problem, the folks in charge opted to leave voice mail messages for all the employees to check around for anything out of place. An hour after the threat, workers say they were finally evacuated, but their clients were

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McDonald's up for sale

Foreclosure auction set for September 15

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McDonald's Restaurant. FDY Catering vice president Keith Haywood also refuses comment.

The facility would remain closed during renovations. Gantt reportedly has asked developer Ron Leeper for an estimate of renovation and fix-up costs.

A vibrant McDonald's Cafeteria is considered a cornerstone of efforts to sustain redevelopment of the Beatties Ford Road corridor. The facility anchors the north end of the current redevelopment district.

Many call it a community trea-

sure and several efforts have been made to preserve the complex since McDonald's death in 1995. His widow, Eunice, has managed the establishment since her husband's death.

Many in the black community say they want the restaurant to remain in African American hands. Several investor groups have tried unsuccessfully to work out purchase agreements.

McDonald learned to cook in New York City and returned to Charlotte to set up a restaurant that became widely known for its good food. It was also known as a place where the community could gather - informally over breakfast or lunch and formally in the dozens of dinners and banquets in the facility's banquet rooms.

Troubles have mounted as restaurant patronage declined and the facility fell into disrepair.

Restaurant employees were laid off on Aug. 17, many angrily complaining of not being treated fairly after years of service. Some had worked at McDonald's as long as 25 years.

On Aug. 20, a fire started in a room of the adjacent McDonald's Inn. The blaze was intentionally set, but police have not made an arrest, said arson investigator A.E. Taylor, a member of the joint police-fire department Arson Investigation Task Force.

"We are calling it a set fire," Taylor said Wednesday. He would not discuss how the fire was set, but estimated damage at less than \$25,000.

Only two guests were in the hotel at the time of the fire, which began about 3:30 p.m. in a third floor room. Most of the damage to the third and fourth floors was from smoke, fire officials said.

Spann appeal rejected by judge

Continued from page 1A

Blume continued. "Sterling should get a new trial on either the evidence or the fact his lawyers did not do a good job. It has got to be one or the other. It can't be neither."

An earlier appeal on the competence of Spann's first lawyers failed, leading to the latest effort to free him.

Blume admitted 15 years was a long time to fight for a new trial, even in a death penalty case.

But, he said, "his case is more screwed up than the average case. There have always been serious questions about the competency of his representation at trial. Judges have said it may not have mattered, but that was before this new evidence was presented."

The new evidence includes confessions of participation in the crime for the man who pleaded

guilty in the third murder in the series and analysis by two leading forensic scientists tying the three murders together and removing Spann as the murderer.

The three murders occurred within 12 miles of each other in western York County, in and about Clover. All three victims were strangled and sexually assaulted.

Spann was already in jail on charges in the Neill murder when the third murder occurred on Nov. 16, 1981.

The first victim, Mary Ring, was found in her bathtub on July 18, 1981, almost two months before Neill was found on Sept. 14.

Among the new evidence is a

videotaped confession by William Johnny Hullitt, who is serving a life sentence for the third murder, of Bessie Alexander, 69. Hullitt and his brother-in-law had a produce sales route in the area of the deaths.

Hullitt refused to answer questions about the Neill killing during the November hearing. He refused to acknowledge that he confessed to the Neill murder.

But forensic pathologist Werner Spitz and forensic psychiatrist Emanuel Tanay testified Neill's murder was one of the three 1981 murders of elderly white women done by one killer.

They concluded the murders were committed by a "sadistic sexual predator."



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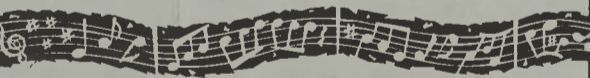
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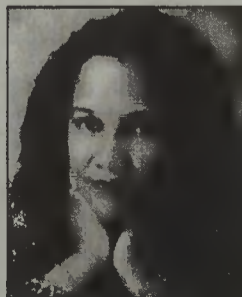
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