

A designing man sets his sights on fashion success



Jon Stout puts the finishing touches on model Robin Willet before the University Mall fashion show

By **KAREN ENTRIKEN**
Staff Writer

Most students strive to gain experience for their future careers — they scramble to join field-related organizations, interview for internships, take jobs for little or no pay in return for experience — anything to put on that resume.

Jon Stout, a junior English major who plans to go into fashion merchandising, already has an impressive entry for the "experience" category — he organized a fashion show featuring UNC students and University Mall merchants. Stout executed his plan Saturday, March 19, with shows at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Stout's career interests began in high school when he helped organize a talent show and met fashion coordinator Lane Ragsdale. Ragsdale worked for the Central Carolina Foundation, a company that produces fashion shows for shopping malls; through Ragsdale, Stout got involved in the foundation and formed a student branch of the company, of which he is president.

His idea to create a fashion show centering around UNC came from the limited number of opportunities for an early start in his career.

"I want to work for a modeling agency, but they usually have small staffs with no internships, so it's hard to get valuable career experience," Stout says.

He began by presenting his plan to University Mall officials, who were reluctant to accept the proposal of just another fashion show in the mall. However, Stout's offer to feature student models and popular college clothes gave the show a unique bent that appealed to store managers.

"They figured the student features would attract other students," Stout said.

Next, 29 models were selected to be in the show. Stout had previously worked with some of the models; others were screened through interviews conducted by professional models and agents. Stout ended up with 16 male and 13 female models.

One of the female models, sophomore Liz Reed, was selected because of her modeling experience with the Trade Mart in Charlotte. The Trade Mart holds shows with representatives from different clothing companies, such as Union Bay and Esprit.

"I tried on clothes for buyers (at Trade Mart) and modeled them," Reed said. "I also did runway modeling for Benetton. I walked into the store and the fashion coordinator for the show was there so I got to model. It was really luck."

Stout also hired Jim Hale and Alicia Lassiter to narrate the show. Hale, a sports anchorman for an Asheville news broadcast, was voted one of the 10 best-looking news broadcasters in a Playgirl magazine feature. Lassiter, a recent UNC graduate, was winner of the Miss Greater Raleigh pageant.

The theme of the show, titled "Trend and Tradition: A Celebration of Contrast," was geared toward the fashion needs of students who dress for many situations. Because of this, Stout divided the show into six segments, each dealing with a different part of a student's life.

"Unlike most fashion shows, the focus wasn't just on the clothes. This show sold images and concepts," Stout said.

The show included scenes like "Midterm Examination," which featured campus wear, "Hot Pursuits," which featured athletic wear, "Black and Bright" cocktail clothes and "Tropical Punch" beach wear.

Reed, who modeled in the business and lingerie scenes, described each scene as a skit in which the clothes were acted out. Props were used to help promote the image.

"For the business theme we carried briefcases and wore glasses," Reid said.

Stout and his two fashion coordinators, Jon Shipley and Melissa Asbill, worked together to produce a show with a mixture of fashions from different stores.

Stout's philosophy of fashion also came into play in the show.

"I believe in an eclectic wardrobe. You need to mix up clothes, not buy everything from the same store."

For his own tastes, Stout prefers a traditional look because trends in men's clothing tend to change so slowly.

Trends in today's models, Stout says, are more focused on individualistic beauty rather than a mannequin-like, runway look. He played this trend up in his fashion show by recruiting models with interesting looks.

Where will all this hard work lead Jon Stout in the future? New York City's fashion industry is his goal, but he says he'd also like to work in Miami or Dallas. His interests lie in camera work and coordinating fashion shows and photo shoots for magazines and catalogues.

Until then, look for proof of his work next fall. He's already planning a charity fashion show that will feature Franklin Street merchants and another show at North Hills Mall in Raleigh.