Chameleon - a long awaited dream for two Baltimore entrepreneurs

By Portia E. Badham
AFRO Staff Writer

On April 6, Sonia Stockton and Beverly Booth-Brown saw their dream come true. That's the day their new boutique, Chameleon opened in Mt. Washington.

Mrs. Stockton, a marketing consultant and part-time instructor at the University of Baltimore, and Mrs. Brown, a fashion designer, always wanted to go into business for themselves.

They had been friends since high school but it wasn't until 1979 when they talked during a PTA meeting at their children's school, did they realize that their separate ambitions could be pursued as a joint venture.

With the idea of opening a shop downtown, they considered the Inner Harbor but later decided opening a location at Harborplace could be too costly.

"We continued to concentrate on downtown," said Mrs. Brown. "But we later abandoned the idea because there were just too many problems involved. We were looking but getting very discouraged."

In January of this year, they attended the Boutique Show in New York and "got fired up" again about the idea, according to Mrs. Brown.

"We knew this was something we really wanted to do, so we came back, sat down and had a pow-wow," she said.

In February they began scanning the newspapers and contacting real estate agents and found a location in the Mt. Washington area on Sulgrave Avenue. At the same time, they came across another location at 5726 Falls Road.

"I was driving on Falls Road and almost had an accident when I saw this building. It was perfect," Mrs. Stockton recalls.

But she also recalls the difficulty the two encountered when contacting real estate agents who were not as responsive when they learned the entrepreneurs were black females.

However, within a week they were notified that they had been chosen over other interested applicants including an antique shop and a beauty salon for the Falls Road location.

With the help of husbands, family and friends, they were able to put together their own funds and bypass needing any small business loans.

"We were lucky that this place was already remodeled and that our family was so supportive", stated Mrs. Stockton, who as a consultant to small businesses, said she was aware of how difficult it is to get funding for a small business.

Family and friends also pitched in to help decorate the shop which was already complete with white painted stucco walls and carpeting. Bamboo shades, antique furniture and chrome fixtures add to the elegance of the boutique.

According to the owners, the concept of Chameleon is different and distinctive apparel at affordable prices, geared toward the working woman who needs variety in her wardrobe.

Chameleon features clothing by local designers including Betty Fenner, Wendy Robinson, Shirley Quillens, Carolyn Davis, Ardythe Davis and Mrs. Brown, who is a graduate of the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York.

The bulk of the merchandise ranges from $40 to $100 and includes casual to evening attire. The boutique also carries selections from out-of-town manufacturers along with jewelry and handbag accessories.

Chameleon is open from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

AFRO Photo by Mark Gall

CHAMELEON HAS ARRIVED — Sonia Stockton and Beverly Booth-Brown are the owners of Chameleon, a new boutique on Falls Road that offers apparel by local designers. The owners, shown wearing designer apparel from their boutique, held a gala opening April 4 and 5.

Keene named veep

Cecil B. Keene Jr., has been named vice-president of personnel of American Health and Life Insurance Company, an operating company of Commercial Credit Company.

Keene will be responsible and employee relations, salary and benefits administration, training and equal opportunity planning.

Prior to joining American Health and Life, Keene was a personnel consultant for Commercial Credit Computer Services. Previous to that he held several management positions in the personnel area including Control Data Corporation in Minneapolis.

Keene holds a bachelor of science degree from Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, alabama. A U.S. Air Force veteran, he is a former member of Toastmasters, Sertoma and the Urban League in Minneapolis.

Americna Health and Life Insurance Company offers individual and group life, disability and medical expense insurance, credit life and disability insurance nationwide.

Commercial Credit, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Control Data Corporation of Minneapolis, is a worldwide financial services institution with nearly 9,000 employees and more than 950 offices.

Headquartered in Baltimore since its founding in 1912, the company offers financial, insurance, education and technology services to more than a million customers worldwide.

Omni Graphics-complete design firm

Omni Graphics Productions is a full-line graphic design studio owned and operated by Chuck Taylor.

The firm, located at 2225 St. Paul St. had its humble beginnings in Taylor's home three years ago.

With several ideas and money borrowed from his friends, Taylor set up his business singlehandedly. "While working for a sign anf graphic company, I saw a need for a company that could prepare artwork for all types of business.

"I saw a need for a company that would deal with minority businesses the same as they would with white firms. Minority businesses always seem to get the leftover thought consideration process."

Omni Graphics provides various types of advertising materials including corporate identification packages, transit advertising, bill board, and media commercials.

After one year working out of his home, Taylor moved in 1979 to the present location, a three-story office building which he bought in April of this year.

Chuck Taylor

Seven people are employed with the firm and among the clients are Bethlehem Steel, Commercial Credit Supply, Cummings & Smith and the C&P Telephone Company.

Taylor points out that a large percentage of black businesses do not adequately use professional services, especially advertising.

"The major problem is that these firms don't have advertising budgets. Then when sales are off and you try to advertise, it's too little, too late," said Taylor.

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ARS— a growing insurance firm

Abdullah R. Muhammad heads ARS Insurance Agency which features insurance coverage for life, health, home, car and business.

Muhammad began his insurance career in April 1973 with Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. He remained with the company for nearly two years before branching out on his own.

In May 1976 he was given an opportunity to establish his own multiline insurance agency with Nationwide Insurance, where he began as an employee-agent. He worked there until he moved his office into the basement of his home at 1222 Harwood Ave.

He joined a bookkeeping and tax office at 617 N. Collington Ave in 1977 and remained there until September 1979. In 1978 he became an independent contractor with Nationwide Insurance.

Muhammad moved into his present location at 629 N. Collington Ave. and purchased the building in April of this year. And two months later opened his second location at Mondawmin Mall.

Abdullah R. Muhammad

Since he began as a nationwide agent, Muhammad has written $1,000,000 in life insurance each year. He was awarded the "Agent of The Year" award for his district in 1979 and has received numerous other awards and prizes for his outstanding sales achievements.

He currently has more than 2,000 policyholders and a staff of four. Last year, he grossed over $60,000 in commissions and hopes to do over $80,000 this year.

MSU student selected presidential intern

Albert Pearsall III is the first student in the graduate school of business at Morgan State University to be chosen for the Presidential Management Internship Program.

Pearsall, originally from Washington, D.C. was one of 900 applicants applying for the prestigous two-year internship.

The program was created by President Carter in 1978 to bring a cross section of management personnel into the government agencies.

The recent MSU graduate has already been notified that a position awaits him in the Justice Department and he should begin his new job within the next few weeks.

Albert Pearsall III

Marketing mama's medicine

New store features homemade arthritis cure

James Bean didn't imagine two years ago that his mother's homemade arthritis cure would become so much in demand that he would bottle the product and open a store. But he did just that.

Last November, Bean opened a health food store in downtown Baltimore to market his mother's medicine, which he says has helped relieve the pain of arthritis sufferers. The product is called Liquid Life.

The natural remedy, made by his mother, Mrs. Mary Ann Moore of Carlisle, Ky., contains herbs and roots. Mrs. Moore, 66, an arthritis sufferer herself, got tired of going to the doctor and getting no relief for her pain.

So she headed out to the woods, dug up some roots and herbs and made her own remedy. Although Mrs. Moore is a domestic worker with less than a 10th grade education, she has studied roots and herbs on her own.

Bean, originally from Kentucky and now living in Laurel, Md., first brought the mixture home in 1977 at the request of several friends who used it and said they achieved more than satisfactory results.

"Mom believes for every kind of pain, there's a weed or herb for it," he said. "She says that every growing thing on this earth was put here for a reason."

In December 1979, Bean was granted a patent and started plans to market the item.

In addition to the store, at 222 N. Liberty St., Bean has four salesmen who are trying to get the product into hospitals.

AFRO Photo by Mark Gall

BACK TO BASICS — James Bean opened his downtown health food in November 1980 to market his mother's homemade remedy for arthritis pain. The store is located at 222 N. Liberty St.

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