

BZB Holiday Gift and Art Show

Hosted by Juanita Britton, The Busiest Bee

BY MICHAELA DOYLE

Juanita Britton started out her entrepreneurial dreams at an early age. Aptly earning her nickname as the Busy Bee, she began her first business when she was only 10 years old, a lemonade stand that quickly grew to have locations at six different corners in her Detroit neighborhood. She has since opened a gallery; started her foundation, Random Acts of Kindness; become a partner with Paradises enterprise, which runs stores such as Brooks Brothers; served as a public relations and marketing consultant and done so much more.

One Friday morning last month, I talked with Britton in her ornately decorated living room at her house in Anacostia. Starting her day early, she had woken up at 5 that morning to make sure all of her six stores at National airport were running smoothly. Britton sat on the floor with strokes of sunlight falling across her face, preparing to go to Tanzania for her program, Random Acts of Kindness. She was surrounded by small gifts to be given to the women in the village to which she was traveling. Her concern with community goes beyond DC, but she works hard at home to give back to the city that she calls her own.

The Holiday Market

Somehow Britton still finds time to run her holiday market, the BZB Holiday Gift and Art Show, the largest upscale African-American market on the East coast. Located at Shiloh Baptist church in the Shiloh Family Life Center, this will be the 18th year she has hosted the market. Even the first day it opened 18 years ago, people lined up outside of the church in the snow waiting to get in.

Customers and vendors come from all over to take part in the holiday market, but Britton ensures that it benefits and stays connected the local community. "I work hard to employ people from the community and give them job opportunities [at the market]," says Britton. "I'm not a producer removed; I am connected with each person there," she says.

Before opening the market, Britton worked with a group of men from Lorton prison. As they were in transition to a halfway house, Britton counseled them on life lessons and entrepreneurial skills. She offered them an opportunity to promote her gift show, and they were eager to help. Many of them were included in all aspects of the process, directly working at the market setting up tables, serving food and helping out in any way necessary. With Britton's guidance, they helped make the market a major success.

Many vendors at the market have been

with Britton from the start. "They are artistic, and they're making a living out of it, so they really get it," she says. From the beginning, Britton has met many of the artisans while traveling around the world, and several come from Eastern Market on Capitol Hill. Britton explains that the holiday market stands out because of the cross section of goods available. The BZB Holiday Gift and Art Show includes everything from couture designs, to furniture, children's toys and more rootsy products.

When asked about her passion for the market, Britton said, "There's always a new growth energy in Washington. So many people are receptive to art. My goal is to work with the community to bring the young people along to love art and love what the city has to offer."

Britton's 18th Annual BZB Holiday Gift and Art Show runs every Saturday from Nov. 29 until Dec. 20. It is located at Shiloh Baptist Church at 1510 Ninth St. NW. Ample parking is available, and the church is accessible by Metro at the Mount Vernon Metro stop. For more information, call 202-610-4188. To learn more about the market and Britton, visit www.bzbinternational.com. ★



Juanita Britton in one of her many beautiful ensembles: "That's one of my passions, being fabulous." Similar fashions will be available at her holiday market.

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