



Southeast Stylings

# Northeast Flair

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY KHADIJAH ALI-COLEMAN

TOP: "The transition to being a full-time artist has been tough, but I've been really fortunate to continue to get gigs to headline," says singer Afi Soul.

BOTTOM: Guests enjoyed the popular poet Bassey Ikpi in this intimate setting sponsored by Wil Christian of State Farm Insurance.



## Local Business Owners Use Performance Art to Attract Clients

Louisiana native Wil Christian moved to Washington DC after being appointed by the New Orleans government to help lead evacuation efforts after the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005. An Army Reservist, Christian was called away just as his career as an attorney was successfully growing. However, the break from law allowed Christian to take a moment to assess his life's direction.

"I decided then that I needed a change," Christian remembers.

With this revelation, Christian set out to do just that. This past summer, he decided to forego returning to Louisiana, and instead, bought a home in a quiet neighborhood off of Ridge Rd. in SE. In addition, he made a career change as well. This year he opened this year his own State Farm branch, located at 3225 Pennsylvania Ave, SE.

"When I was an attorney, I found that State Farm was the insurance company that really looked out for their clients' best interests, so they were the natural choice when I decided to change careers," said Christian.

To get the word out about his new business and to attract new clients, Christian took a unique approach. He partnered with Long & Foster Real Estate agent Maceo Thomas to throw an upscale spoken word event that would allow him to distribute information about his State Farm branch while entertaining potential clients.

Christian and Thomas then connected with businessman Michael Craig, owner of the male salon MICHAEL CRAIG: The Proper Name in Male Grooming located in the 1200 block of Pennsylvania Ave, SE. Craig agreed to provide the host space at his salon.

The event took place on Dec. 12, with featured Def Poetry Jam artist Bassey Ikpi, who also served as the event's MC. Guests enjoyed the intimate setting and an up and close opportunity to enjoy the popular poet who performed new pieces she had written to be included in her upcoming book.

"This was a really great idea," said one attendee at the end of the event. "More businesses should consider putting on art-inspired events to promote their businesses. They would definitely attract more clients."

For information on any upcoming events sponsored by



LEFT: Daniel Allen, better known by his artist name Malik Shabazz is the president of the Ward 8 Arts Association.

RIGHT: A young girl colors a mural hand-drawn by Malik Shabazz at a recent event held by the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum.



Wil Christian, contact him at 202-582-3333 or email him at wil@wilchristianinsurance.com.

## Ward 8 Arts Association's Outspoken President is Ready for Some Action in 2009

You might have seen him around town. Mid-length locks and round-rimmed spectacles give him a studious appearance. And he can almost always be found in the near vicinity is an easel or with some piece of art that he has recently completed and is toting around. Daniel Allen, better known by his artist name Malik Shabazz is a DC fixture. What you probably didn't realize is that he is the founder and president of the Ward 8 Arts Association.

"My goal this year is to make the association more visible and formulate some type of marketing strategy," says Shabazz. Without a website or working email address, the association is not Google search-worthy as yet, but Allen says that it's only a matter of time. And, time, it seems, has been kind to him as his art ability has become acclaimed locally.

He came to DC from New York fifteen years-ago, with no knowledge that he had an artistic bone in his body.

"I had no idea I could draw," says the 60-something year-old Shabazz. "But, then, when I was working at Pizza Hut, I would just start drawing and pretty soon, it just grew from there."

Drawing life-like portraits by hand, Shabazz gained local attention when he was featured in a 1999 article in the Washington Post about how he would set up shop at an area laundromat and attract onlookers who marveled at his artwork as he waited for his laundry to dry. He would later become known for lining his artwork up along Mississippi Ave. in SE and creating an art gallery on the street selling art to passer-bys.

"Every time I would bring my artwork out, the drug dealers and prostitutes would leave and let me be," says Shabazz. "The people who worked and lived in the area began to see what I positive difference I was making in the community."

Shabazz paid attention to local groups like the Peaceaholics and other youth-based groups and decided he wanted to do something involving the youth and art. He came up with the idea of the Ward 8 Arts Association and was able to find a home with the United Black Fund located at 2500 MLK Ave., SE.

"I focus on prevention. It's not always only about art. I teach the youth about nutrition, why you should stay away from drugs and doing illegal things," says Shabazz. Shabazz is the only paid employee of the Ward 8 Association and has had trouble keeping volunteers committed to the mission of the group.

"I need administrative help," says Shabazz. "But, it seems that whenever someone comes on board to help, once it becomes [financially convenient] for them to benefit from the opportunities, they take what they can and leave. I need people who are committed to helping me work with these young people."

Shabazz and volunteers work with youth—"anyone old enough to use the bathroom on their own"—at the studio at 2500 MLK Ave., SE and engage them in hands-on crafts that utilize their visual art gifts. Shabazz says that he will soon be working within McGogny Elementary School and has worked in Ballou High School for some time now.

While Ward 7's Art Collaborative has strong support from Ward 7 Councilmember Yvette Alexander, Shabazz has expressed frustration with getting Ward 8 Councilmember Marion Barry interested in supporting the work of the Ward 8 Association.

"Every time I call Marion Barry's office to get some type of funding or invite him out to our site, they tell me to send my request in an email," said Shabazz. Despite challenges with connecting with local funders and politicians, Shabazz still creates a buzz with the work he is doing artistically and with young people and represents the Ward 8 Arts Association vibrantly. He was recently commissioned by the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum to host an arts and crafts workshop for youth, creating the outline for a mural where children colored and decorated it in segments.

Shabazz is proud of what he has accomplished so

far and knows the Ward 8 Association will gain momentum soon. Musing about his mortality and his legacy, Shabazz tells that he just wants to make his mark on the world.

"My dream is that when I go up to that big old art studio in the sky, I will know that I have made a difference in some child's life. That's what I want to leave behind."

## Triple-Threat Afi Soul is Making her Mark in the New Year

The week before Christmas, DC-based singer Afi Lydia was busy. The envy of the average aspiring local artist, Lydia—known onstage as Afi Soul—had a noteworthy gig in NW at the Butler-Wyatt Boys & Girls Club as national R & B recording artist Monica's opening act for a holiday party. The following week, she had a dual gig as hostess and featured act for a Kwanzaa celebration at Artmosphere Café on Rhode Island Ave. A single mother of three and head of a busy household, Afi Soul loves the bustle.

"I've been fortunate to continue to get gigs to headline and open for major acts like Monica," she said. "The transition to being a full-time artist has been tough with three children dependent on me, but lately, I've been really fortunate."

A professional African dancer who has been dancing since she was two years-old, the DC-raised singer credits the living legend Melvin Deal of the African Heritage Drummers among her mentors as a professional artist. Working with Deal has helped nurture her love of the arts and take her craft seriously.

"My passion is music," says Afi Soul. "But, dancing will always be a part of me."

Set to release a new CD in the summer or fall of 2009, Afi Soul is still enjoying sales of her CD "Lovely" that she released in 2007. She will be producing a video for the single "Baby" off of that album in late January 2009. To find out more about the video's release and to get Afi Soul's performance updates, visit her online space at [www.myspace.com/afisoul](http://www.myspace.com/afisoul). ★