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Reverend John T. Johnson, Past President of the Fayetteville Cumberland County Ministerial Council, Inc. – Liaison for The Council /Fayetteville State University”



Rev. John T. Johnson
(910) 818-1149

Community News

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Perkins Dry Cleaning: Where Entrepreneurship Meets Tradition

Story by Val Jones - Staff writer

Photos by JJ Jones

On Tuesday, November 17, 2009, the birth of a tradition took place in Fayetteville, NC on Murchison Road. A&H Cleaners, for years a mainstay in the community, was re-dedicated and re-established under a new name and ownership – Perkins Dry Cleaning Services.

Located at 1912 Murchison Road, Perkins Dry Cleaning Services inhabits the same building as the historic A&H Cleaners. However, there's a new look and a new spirit that emanates from the business these days. And that can be attributed to new owner, Nicholas Perkins.

A 1999 graduate of E.E. Smith High School and a 2003 graduate of Fayetteville State University, Nicholas Perkins is President and CEO of Perkins Management Services Company, Inc. Perkins Management is primarily a full-service food management company. "We manage cafeterias and our primary target is historically black colleges and universities," says Nicholas. "We're up-and-coming in the industry and don't have any majority partnerships or joint ventures. That's very important for me. The contracts we have are our own. I own 100% of my company and there are no silent partners out there."

Going from football to food service while attending Fayetteville State University, Nicholas also worked while as a breakfast cook at the Roxie Ave Center (a mental health and substance abuse treatment center) to help subsidize his education. Ironically, Perkins Management now has the contract to handle food for all the clients — including breakfast, lunch, dinner and evening snacks.

Upon graduating from the Marion Rex Harris School of Business & Economics and receiving a degree in Business Management from FSU, Nicholas went to work for Aramark — the largest food service company in the world at the time. And as he says, "I got a great experience in seeing food service at a whole other level."

With the spirit of entrepreneurship blazing in his blood, Nicholas Perkins decided to take his business savvy and faith and step out on his own in the highly competitive industry of food service, developing Perkins Management Services with his right-hand man and frat brother of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Barry McCauley (V.P. Marketing).

It is a known fact that very few minority contractors are able to survive in the industry because it is dominated by large businesses. However, Perkins Management seems to be more than holding its own. In fact, one could say that business is steadily growing. Nicholas and Barry are incredibly busy these days securing new contracts and working hard to continue the growth and success of the company.

Nicholas states: "I'm probably one of the lone companies that are trying to fight to maintain their own identity as a viable contractor, being able to manage without joint venturing or team arrangements because, most of the time, small businesses get lost. So, I've been very resistant to that. I could have grown faster if I had been a little more receptive to it, but I decided to take the road a little less traveled and I believe that ultimately what we sacrifice now will pay off in the long run and we'll be better off."

So how did this food service management entrepreneur venture off into the dry cleaning business? The call of community and tradition.

"Food service is my primary business; but I did this for the community," says Nicholas. "When I saw that A&H Cleaners was for sale, I knew that for years this was an African American business in the heart of the African American community, owned and operated by African Americans. I felt, if this business was to be sold, that tradition should continue. Mr. Harris could have sold it to anybody because he had other offers. But once we talked, we kind of clicked and everything worked out."

Nicholas continues: "I've always been big on history and I'm a student of the Civil Rights movement. One of my all-time heroes is Dr.



Jackie Alexander, Floyd Shorter- President of the Fayetteville Business & Professional League, Nicholas Perkins- President & CEO of Perkins Management Service and far right Dr. Mary Hales- VP of FB&PL with Perkins Dry Cleaning family & staff members.

For more information on Perkins Management Services, call 910-339-0901 or go to the website at www.perkinsmanagement.com.



Community Leaders at Perkins Dry Cleaning Ribbon Cutting
Nicholas Perkins, Rex Harris, Dr. Mary Hales & Rev. King & Wife

A.G. (Arthur George) Gaston of Birmingham, Alabama. He was one of the first Black male millionaires. He came up during the Great Depression and the Civil Rights Movement and was able to become a multi-millionaire. In his books ("Green Power"), he would say to our generation that we don't have any excuse. He lived to be over 100 years of age and his business is still standing today in the heart of the Black community and still bears his name. He was one of my major influences in making sure that I come back home and do something of value in the Black community that I came up in."

The timing probably could not have been better. With the infusion of millions of dollars by the government to widen roads and make renovations to the Murchison Road area because of the coming of BRAC, Nicholas stepped up to the plate and accepted the challenge to building up the African-American business community in this area. "I issue the challenge to other business people to see that there's going to be some opportunity here. So, let's clean up Murchison Road and revitalize it," says Nicholas.

When it comes to his predecessor, Marion Rex Harris, Nicholas speaks with pride and respect. "Mr. Harris has been a mentor to me. When I saw the 'For Sale' sign in front of the cleaners, I contacted him. He knew of me but we didn't really know each other. However, once we started talking and ironing out the details of the acquisition, he took more of an interest in me, like 'hey this kid is something special here.' Then we would go on and on and we've just built a really great relationship where I've been able to learn and see some of the things he's done."

Continuing his thoughts on Marion Rex Harris, Nicholas says: "He's quite amazing! He says that I'm going to be able to do far greater things than what he's done and I humbly thank him for that. But, Mr. Harris has done so much in his business career and his story needs to be told. Not just on a black or white level, but history and business period. He is a dynamic businessman! I have had the opportunity to be around Mr. Harris and see some of the many awards he's won as well as the letters of accolades from the President of the United States, Secretary of Commerce and family members of major Fortune 500 companies. He's such an asset to the community, probably more than most people know. And he's really been a rock as far as offering business advice to me."

No doubt, the legacy of Marion Rex Harris and A&H Cleaners continues with new blood and the birth of Perkins Dry Cleaning Services.

The grand opening was held on Tuesday November 17, 2009 (Nicholas' 29th birthday) at 10am with a ribbon cutting ceremony and building dedication in honor of Nicholas' grandmother and "best girl" – Laurene Perkins. Local ministers delivered invocations and various dignitaries from the community offered words of encouragement.

"This was a great day for Fayetteville to be able to bring back something that was a staple in the community for so long," says Nicholas. "A&H Cleaners really did great work and they were very really good at what they did. "I was blessed and fortunate to inherit over 80% of the staff. I vow to duplicate the level of quality that the community has received from A&H over the years."

Perkins Dry Cleaning Services is located at 1912 Murchison Road in Fayetteville. Hours of operation: Mon-Fri 7am -7pm; Sat 9am -4pm; closed Sundays. Telephone number is 910-339-1536.

Their rates are incredibly competitive and Perkins Dry Cleaning offers these specials:

- 5 shirts laundered for \$5.95 (pressed & starched...not dry-cleaned)
- 3 suits 19.95 * 3 dresses 19.95
- 3 pants dry-cleaned 9.95
- 3 shirts dry-cleaned 9.95
- 3 skirts dry-cleaned 9.95

All items every Tuesday (Community Day) with the exception of suede or leather is cleaned for 2.75, with the same quality you would expect on any other day.

Tradition and entrepreneurship go hand and hand with Nicholas Perkins. He is proud that with hard work, faith, dedication, determination and business savvy, you can make your own way and a difference in the community in this competitive world. "Mr. Harris and Dr. Gaston have being an inspiration to me and maybe I can inspire that next young entrepreneur-to-be," remarks Nicholas. "You have to find a need and fill it. Be a problem-solver. That's what entrepreneurs are. We solve problems; we fill voids."

Now THAT'S an entrepreneur!