

Sunday, October 2, 2016
Holiday Inn – Downtown St. Louis
9:00 AM CST
Dr. GeNita Williams

It was Sunday, October 2, 2016 at approximately 9:00 AM and guests had already begun to assemble in the hotel lobby of the Holiday Inn - Downtown, Convention Center, awaiting the doors to open for the 2nd annual, St. Louis Natural Hair & Black Culture Expo (STLNHBCE). The Expo was to begin at 10:00 AM and by 10:30 AM, vendors were already meeting and greeting our guests. The St. Louis Natural Hair & Black Culture Expo's CEO/Founder, Mr. Christopher H. Simpson, "Chris" and his team were in tow, greeting vendors and consumers as they arrived to the Expo. By 12 noon, exactly two (2) hours after opening the doors, the ballroom was filled with guests and consumers, ready to take advantage of all the Expo had to offer! The energy was positive, captivating and electric! Vendors were upbeat, motivated and ready to meet the needs of our consumers. The STLNHBCE Models were beautiful, elegant, and graceful. They moved about the room, ready to meet and greet our guests as they filled the ballroom of the Holiday Inn! Upon entering the ballroom, one could not help but be awe-struck by all that was occurring in this space. The STLNHBCE was in full effect, seeming not to have missed one step nor having forgotten one detail!

Upon entering the event, Maisha Simpson and Lorie Warford, Expo volunteers, greeted guests at the door, adorning their natural hair and brandishing warm and welcoming smiles. These ladies checked in all guests and provided each guest with a sample bag of natural hair products. Guests who purchased a VIP ticket were provided a SWAG bag (this bag had a plethora of product samples from various natural hair product companies), a St. Louis Natural Hair & Black Culture Expo tee-shirt, a ticket for a complimentary glass of wine (or a non-alcoholic beverage, if chosen) and prime seating for the Expo showcasing which took place on the main stage in the ballroom. Needless-to-say, Chris took every step to ensure his guests, both general admission and VIP, were provided with complimentary items for attending the Expo.

After checking in, guests were ushered down the main hall entry area, where they could capture photos in front of the Expo's step and repeat photo back-drop. This seemed to be a guest favorite, as most guests stopped to take pictures with performers from the Expo, STLNHBCE Models and with the Expo team. Next, as guests were lead to the ballroom, they were greeted by vendors who lined the hallway outside of the ballroom!

Inside the ballroom, is where the magic was happening! Vendors, vendors, and more vendors lined each wall of the ballroom. While there were a number of clothing, jewelry, cosmetic, art, and book vendors, the mass majority of vendors were natural hair product vendors and natural hair stylists! Some of the natural hair brands represented at the Expo were Design Essentials, Curly Dew, Healthy Hair Solutions, Whisper Whip, KOSI Naturals, Erthtonez and Hair Hunny to name a few. However, it would be a huge mistake not to mention the featured stylist of the Expo, Stylist April B and her natural hair product, Hydrate Me *PLEASE*.

St. Louis Natural Hair & Black Culture Expo 2016 Featured Stylist and Corporate Sponsor:

*April McLurkin or Stylist April B is from Atlanta, GA and joined the Expo as the featured stylist in March 2016. April B creates eccentric and elegant braided, crocheted and natural hair styles for all sorts of hair types. April B coined "Celebrity Stylist April B" because of her work with various recording artists such as T-Pain and Future, and Chris Brown during one of his video shoots. Other celebrities like Marshay Green of the Indianapolis Colts often call on April B for her braiding and natural hair artistry. April B's product Hydrate Me *PLEASE*, has been featured in a number of magazines and just recently in the current issue (September – November 2016 issue) of Black Hair: Styles and Care Guide Magazine. April B shared that she has always had a passion for creating: art, clothing, etc. April B decided to dedicate her time toward developing her passion of creating art with hair. April B shared, "I could have remained in a job where I was making \$8.00 per hour/\$80 per day or I could create my own line of product and make \$80 per hour!" The choice for April B was simple and Hydrate Me *PLEASE* was born!! Mrs. Linda Clark is April B's manager and friend who worked tirelessly to ensure April B would have a fabulous showcasing but also, Linda worked to ensure the Expo would be flawless! It appears that Linda accomplished both of her Expo goals!

*Casey Strong of Country Financial was the featured sponsor for the St. Louis Natural Hair & Black Culture Expo, 2016. Casey is a Financial Representative with Country Financial who is looking to assist with financial planning for retirement and college/education. Casey is licensed to sell ALL lines of Insurance (auto, home, life, commercial) and Mutual funds, 401k plans, and annuities (retirement planning). Casey and her team joined the Expo as featured sponsor in March 2016. Casey, also adorning her natural tresses opened the Expo, greeting and speaking to Expo attendees about the importance of financial awareness and planning. We know that financial planning has to be a key aspect of financial stability within the black community.

We are so pleased to have welcomed Casey Strong of Country Financial as a means to educating and supporting our people in the quest for sustainable financial decision-making and planning.

The Expo did not stop at offering a variety of vendors with a variety of products, but Expo attendees also witnessed a great list of performers, hair/product demonstrations, and fashion showcasing right on the main stage in the ballroom! STLNBCE Family member, Belle Be of Proclaimed Arts was the entertainment recruiter and stage manager for the Expo. Belle Be seemed to have pulled out all of the stops with this line-up of quality entertainers! With VIP guests sitting in their preferred seating directly around the stage, one became mesmerized by the onslaught of talent, beauty and fashion forward trends represented at this event! Product demonstrations by Daisha Putman of Design Essentials left the audience understanding which type of product was best for their specific type of natural hair. There were several fashion showcases with the most compelling coming from Styles by CuSandra, a children's fashion showcasing segment. CuSandra created each look fashioned by the children for the Styles by CuSandra segment. Bentley Bowties by Heather Williams left onlookers wondering No MORE about how ladies can fashion a bow-tie and be sexy, beautiful and feminine. A Taste of Luxurie Boutique by Tiana Jones showcased a myriad of fashion trends, jewelry and shoes proving that ladies can get everything they need to be fashion-forward from their neighborhood, black-owned boutique. These, of course, are just a few of the acts that hit the main stage for guests to enjoy. Some other acts to grace the main stage were Fifth Degree Burns, KoKo the Poetess, Gabbi the Poet, Corey Black, Lola Girls, Don't Trip, Deonta, NAPPS Natural Hair Salon, Big Tymers Barber Shop, No Competition, Get Fit Crew and last but certainly not least, the host of the show, Bell Darris also graced the stage with a magnificent Violin Solo...simply beautiful!

This Expo did not stop there! There was also a *Natural Zone* created for this Expo. In the *Natural Zone*, Elizabeth Donielle, Social Media Advertising for the STLNBCE Family, conducted a panel discussion entitled, "Let's Talk about Natural Hair." This panel discussion welcomed nine (9) panelists from all "walks of life" to discuss several topics surrounding the natural hair journey and perceptions of such. Elizabeth Donielle worked to gather panelists who would bring realism, life and love to the conversation without needing to be "politically correct." Yes...this discussion got "deep" into natural hair and the audience loved every minute of it!

I could talk all day about the St. Louis Natural Hair & Black Culture Expo! What's more important, however; are the guests, attendees, and consumers who gave rave reviews about the Expo as well! Some comments included, but were not limited to, "Great Expo...I had a wonderful time"; "This Expo is so much better than others I have attended in St. Louis"; "I learned a few new things, saw a few good people and got photo bombed...just a great day at the St. Louis Natural Hair & Black Culture Expo 2016"; "There was so much to see and do...I didn't know where to begin"; "Some of the vendors were late setting up but the Expo was still really good"; "When is the next show?" "It was a lot to do but I mostly just shopped." Vendors even had a great experience, sharing comments such as: "We completely sold out of everything!" (I AM BELLA); "This is great! You all have the recipe now!" (Erica Gayles of Curly Dew); "I am so thankful that Chris thought to include me in this fabulous event!" (Stylist April B); "I had a fabulous time; this is a great turnout and I am so glad I came." (MBellish by Charmega). Even an STLNBCE Model offered, "This experience has been so good for me. We were treated so well and taken care of throughout the process. I appreciate being able to be involved in what I love most, Natural Hair and Black Culture!" (Shari Baru).

In the end, it looks like all was more than well at the St. Louis Natural Hair & Black Culture Expo, 2016! The STLNBCE Family, each with their specific tasks, managed to pull off one of the greatest attended Natural Hair events of the season! Chris, modest and humble, thanked the crowd, vendors, and models, several times for coming out and supporting him, his team and the Expo. Before concluding the show, Chris welcomed his entire STLNBCE Family to the stage to share the spotlight with him. After giving multiple "shout-outs" to just about every vendor in the room, Chris looked upon the audience and said in closing, "Thank you all for coming out, Good Night" leaving everyone anxiously anticipating the next venture from this team!

For pictures, videos, and to post comments about/from the Expo, please go to @st.louisnaturalhairexpo on IG OR FB at <https://www.facebook.com/Stlnhbce/?fref=ts>. Use the #NHBCE2016 in your posts.

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