



A Fashion Upgrade in the District

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Christine Brooks-Copper, President of the Greater Washington Fashion Chamber of Commerce. (Photo by El'Jay DeShield)

and Spa, a mini-oasis catering solely to children. Kahadijah Bronson, owner of spa, recently moved to the District and is eager help make the city a fashion destination.

"I'm not really aware of how D.C. works with fashion," said Bronson. "I think that H Street would be great as the fashion district, it's definitely needed and I think it would work well."

Linda Boyd, Councilman Michael Brown's chief of staff and communications director, said Brown fully supports the GWFCC's efforts to create an economically productive fashion industry in the District.

"I think with the economy the way it is right now, we need to capitalize on any opportunity to create jobs, job training and job opportunities and the fashion industry certainly offers all of those things," said Boyd. "What we are most excited about is that the GWFCC is going out to get data. Once you have data it can assist in getting the outcome we all hope for."

The GWFCC hopes the end result of Fashion Awareness Month will be the establishment of a fashion district.

Derrick Woody, the city's deputy mayor for planning and economic development, has been at the helm of the city's H Street revitalization project and would like to see the corridor give birth to a new fashion scene in the District.

"There is already a basis for this to become a fashion district. There are a lot of salons and boutiques already here on H Street, so it's more of an issue of how to groom what you already have," said Woody. "...We are hopeful that the fashion scene will grow here on H Street."

Christine Brooks-Copper, president of the Greater Washington Fashion of Commerce, wants to create a fashion incubator---a cluster of designer studios, retail and production space--- that would precede the fashion district.

The GWFCC is working with developer Chip Ellis to craft the incubator in the Shaw community, but has yet to decide where the city's new fashion district will be permanently placed.

(May 13, 2009) - Known for its strong hold in government, progressive strides in higher education and expansive real estate markets, the District is a city bustling with economic growth and promise. But there's one multimillion-dollar industry Washington, D.C. lacks, prompting the Greater Washington Fashion Chamber of Commerce (GWFCC) to step in and take charge of the city's barely visible fashion scene.

GWFCC has designated May as D.C. Fashion Awareness Month, with a mission to foster awareness and generate support for all aspects of the local fashion industry. Throughout the month, GWFCC will host events aimed at unifying and educating the local fashion industry about various career opportunities available around the city. The group is also crafting a fashion census to collect details about the District's independent fashion designers.

Evelyn Bandoh, the brainchild behind GWFCC's D.C. Fashion Awareness Month and the fashion census, said planning the initiative has been eventful and she's anxious to see the results of the innovative census.

"The fashion census came about because it is the best way to collect data on what independent fashion designers are in the District," said Bandoh. "The feedback has been really good. When people find out what we are doing they get very motivated and excited."

Heavyweights from the District's political and fashion scenes converged to kick off the month's festivities at Spoiled Rotten Boutique

"If we want funding from government or private donors to finance this initiative, we have to be able to show documentation that this is a growing and vital community," said Brooks-Cropper. "Ideally, I would like the fashion district to be in the in the New York Avenue, North Capital area because it's central. There needs to be a vibrant cultural community, there needs to be a lot of development [that's] very urban."

Ultimately, the GWFCC wants to brand Washington, D.C. as a world-class, culturally diverse city and believes that gaggles of fashion and art are needed to accomplish that feat.

The report from the fashion census should be completed by mid-summer and the GWFCC hopes to begin advocating for a fashion incubator during the next fiscal year.

"They are bursting at the seams with fashion in New York," said Boyd. "The next place to come is obviously Washington, D.C."

For more information about D.C. Fashion Awareness Month, visit GWFCC visit <http://www.gwfcc.org/>