

# Philadelphian pushes 'throwbacks' to urban high fashion

By Monica Lewis

Special to Sentinel-Voice

PHILADELPHIA (NNPA)—Some of the biggest stars in sports, music and entertainment know the man to call for a classic sports jersey for their collection, awards or video show.

They connect with Reuben Harley, the West Philadelphia native who has made throwback jerseys the hottest urban clothing item for everyone from Sean "P. Diddy" Combs to the high school kid next door.

"We had the content and the history of sports, but Reuben took it and made the general public aware of it. He believed in what we did and now the rest of the world wants to see it," said Peter Capolino, president of Mitchell & Ness, a wholesale distributor that has benefited from Harley's efforts.

Last year, Mitchell & Ness, which began as a mom and pop company, grossed \$25 million, nearly five times 2001's earnings, and Capolino said it could not have been done without Harley's knack for drawing a clientele that reads like the Who's Who of the sports and entertainment worlds. Harley not only pitches jerseys to big-shots, he's also become

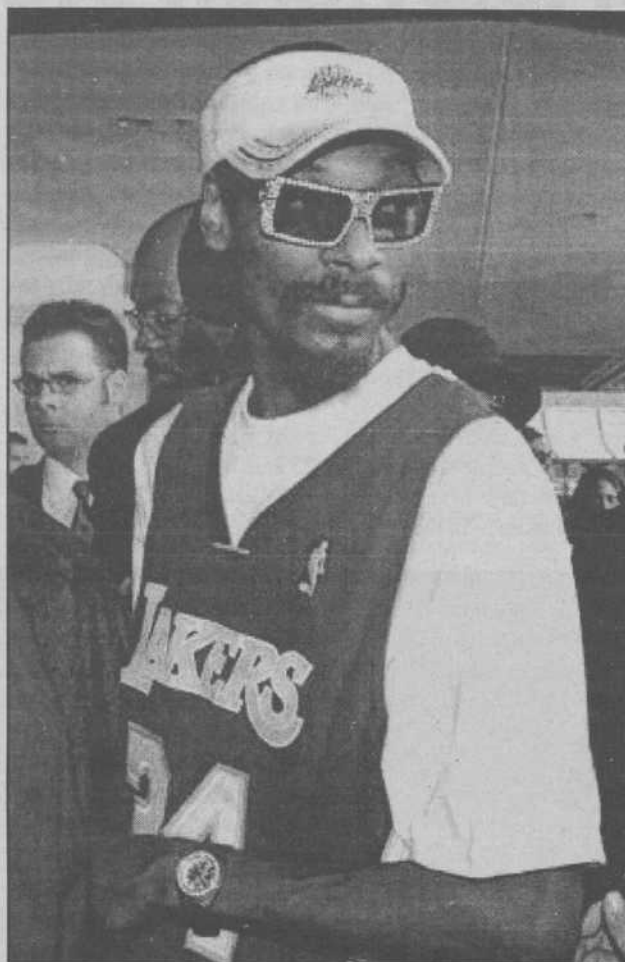
somewhat of a fashion advisor, sitting in on video sets, magazine shoots or standing backstage at awards shows, suiting up performers in the latest old-school athletic look.

"Reuben has very good instincts and I think he's a trusted friend of a lot of entertainers," said Capolino, 58. He can easily spout off names of the biggest hip-hop and R&B stars around thanks to his protégé. "They count on him to look good."

While Capolino is quick to brag on Harley's accomplishments, Harley is much more subdued, almost oblivious to his meteoric rise to success.

He even downplays his own celebrity status, blushing at the sight of a "Vibe" magazine ad in which he is prominently featured. That's not surprising since, a few short years ago, Harley was pushing water ice carts and selling food at local hair salons. Today, he's driving a 2003 custom-made Cadillac Escalade with \$16,000 rims and having a house built in Delaware.

"My whole life, I always hustled. That's who I am and who I represent," said Harley, a 1992 graduate of West Philadelphia High School. "When [I] come like that to



Rapper Snoop Dogg is among a growing throng of celebrities who like to sport "throwback" team jerseys.

the millionaires, they accept me more. I'm genuine to them."

Harley has become such a fixture on the entertainment scene that, on any given weekend, he's invited to spend quality time at the

homes of the rich and famous. When he's not a guest in Donovan McNabb's luxury box at a Philadelphia Eagles game, he's rolling with rapper Fabolous during the NBA All-Star Weekend or jetting off to the Super Bowl, Ameri-

can Music or Grammy award shows.

Just how did Harley become the man when it comes to throwback jerseys? An avid sports fan, Harley began frequenting Mitchell & Ness about 10 years ago, stopping in to buy authentic Negro Leagues hats. After a while, he developed a fondness for the throwback jerseys, which cost between \$200 and \$400. Harley would wait on tables and use tip money to pay on jerseys he placed on law- away. In 1999, Harley challenged Capolino, saying he could make Mitchell & Ness and its stock of throwback jerseys famous.

"He said nobody knows about you, but I'll make your clothing the hottest urban fashion in America," Capolino said, vividly remembering the conversation in which Harley requested the expensive SUV he now drives, if he came through on his promise.

"I said he was out of his mind," Capolino said. "It started very slowly with just a few NBA players and entertainers. Now, everyone has his number. They call him all the time. He can't get any sleep."

But Harley doesn't mind the grind. He enjoys being the front man for throwbacks, of which old-school basketball and Major League Baseball jerseys are most popular. Football and hockey jerseys are quickly catching on, according to Capolino.

In order to stay abreast of the demand, Harley continues to do what he did initially to get throwback jerseys in the spotlight, networking with celebrities at parties and record premieres. He admits that the jerseys may be pricey for non-celebrities, but if you save up like he did, it's worth it.

"When you come up in the inner-city, what do you identify with? Being a doctor is a great thing to be, but as a kid, you looked up to Dr. J," Harley said, remembering when he couldn't afford a Dr.

J jersey, so he settled for a 76ers T-shirt.

"Now, I can purchase a Dr. J jersey," Harley said. "Throwbacks spark childhood imaginations and let you wear what your heroes wore. Right now, I'm living a dream."

Harley's grandmother, Mary Gibson, also finds his success almost unreal. She still lives in the West Philadelphia rowhouse she reared Harley in. A seamstress, Gibson would brush off a young Harley whenever he mentioned he wanted to dress people. One day, Gibson noticed him watching an episode of "The Oprah Winfrey Show" that dealt with pursuing your dreams. From that point, Harley was on his way, she said.

Harley credits his grandmother for raising him right. He still has an aversion to people pulling on his ear, something Gibson regularly did to get him off the streets during his childhood. And even though Harley is now an adult, Gibson still is a major influence. When Harley wanted to rent an expensive Center City apartment, she suggested he put his money into something more meaningful, like owning a home. And, although she hasn't put in any requests for material things, Gibson knows Harley will always have her back.

"We've never talked about him buying me anything, but if I need it, I know I'll get it," said Gibson, who's just happy knowing Harley is now buying as many business suits as he does athletic wear.

"I really don't know how it happened," said Gibson, whose talents have been used to make outfits for some of her son's famous friends, as well as the 76ers-dance team and Eagles cheerleaders.

"He showed me a magazine he was in and tells me that he's going to this place and that place," Gibson continued. "It's just unbelievable."

Monica Lewis writes for the Philadelphia Tribune

## Probe

(Continued from Page 1)

"This has been a witch hunt and a vehement attempt to prosecute Mr. Bradley since 2001," Grimes said, adding that allegations are based on what he said is a city policy and practice to allow personnel to use city credit cards for personal use and then repay the money.

But Compton City Attorney Legrand Clegg denied that the city policy allows personal use of city credit cards.

According to the District Attorney's Office, the arrests are part of an ongoing criminal investigation, and follow a Feb. 12 search of City Hall and numerous other locations by investigators in the District Attorney's Office's Public Integrity Division.

A separate federal investigation is also under way, purportedly looking at city council involvement with Lynwood City Councilman Paul Richards and Michael Aloyan, owner of Hub City Waste Disposal, the company which has the city's trash hauling contract.

Aloyan recently pleaded guilty to bribing a Carson city

council member in an effort to win a trash contract there in February 2002.

"I wasn't really surprised. I knew this has been coming for quite a while," said Royce Esters of the arrests. Esters is a long-time Compton resident and president of the civil rights organization, National Association for Equal Justice in America.

"The problem is that we have to introduce whoever is going to be on the city council in Compton or any city in America to 'we' and not 'I.' Without leadership, without involving the city, this is what happens. When you're interested in yourself instead of the city, this is what happens," said Esters, who has lived in the community since 1956 and at one time was president of the NAACP and the Compton Crime Commission.

Community activist Mollie Bell was not surprised at the arrests, either.

"There has been an ongoing investigation," she said. "But I believe a person is innocent until proven guilty. If they did something wrong, it will come out. But I think

the timing is awfully strange," she added, referring to next month's municipal election.

"Professor Rahh and Ms. Zurita are up against two people the mayor supports. If we find out tomorrow that everybody was not guilty, by the time the election is over this will impact it. Now instead of talking about the wonderful job and new things Rahh and Zurita have done, I'm going to have to spend time talking about the allegations and charges," added Bell.

Business owner Benjamin Holifield also said he was worried that the arrests could have a dampening effect on residents going to the polls April 15.

"I think all the madness needs to be cut out," he said. "The newspapers are saying that Compton is on trial. I'm concerned. Regardless of the guilt or innocence, it's terrible for the city," Holifield said.

Kris Bailey, a political consultant who ran for the Paramount City Council Tuesday, sees something more sinister in the arrests, particularly that of

Arceneaux, whom she described as someone well liked by the citizens and a person of the utmost integrity.

"I think Mayor Perrodin is out to get Ms. Arceneaux because she won't rubber stamp what he wants to do," said Bailey. "She accused Perrodin of co-conspiring to prevent her from obtaining a union endorsement for her city council candidacy."

There also were those who said the arrests were a good thing.

"The good citizens coming in and out of city are so glad," said Lorraine Cervantes, a longtime community activist. "Thank God it's going to impact the election because those two have got to go," she said of Rahh and Zurita.

"Now everybody can see them for the criminals they really are."

While none of the five arrested would comment, Rahh had earlier said: "I welcome the investigation. Maybe we can bring it to closure and resolve it."

Cynthia E. Griffin writes for WAVE Community Newspapers

## CANYON LAKE MORTGAGE, INC

Morse Arberry Jr.  
CEO

2551 S. Fort Apache Rd., Suite 102  
Las Vegas, NV 89117  
(702) 562-2323 • Fax (702) 562-1805  
www.canyonlakemortgage.com