

Hairdressers vie for chance to style first lady

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hair salon owner Barry Fletcher sent Michelle Obama a 17-minute DVD about himself. Hairdresser Keith Harley uploaded his resume to President-elect Barack Obama's website. And salon owner Nicole Cober-Blake plans to get her name in by sending a welcome basket with bath gels, hair products and a robe.

There are plenty of unanswered questions buzzing around the Obamas' impending arrival, but one has hairdressers on the edge of their styling chairs: Who will be

chosen to do Michelle Obama's hair?

Rather than venture out for hair appointments, the first lady typically invites beauticians to the White House. Some of the region's Black salon owners hope their experience with African-American hair could give them an edge over those who coifed the likes of Laura Bush or Hillary Clinton.

Fletcher, the 52-year-old owner of The Hair Palace Salon in Mitchellville, Md., cites his experience in international hairstyling challenges and working with ac-

tress Halle Berry and singer Mya, a D.C. native.

"I'm going to be doing her hair!" Fletcher said, if he has anything to say about it. "This would pretty much validate all of my hard work and effort to get to a level where I could handle a powerful queen like the first lady."

Not that it's all glamour for the stylist. Bernard Portelli, who briefly styled Hillary Clinton's bob back in 1993, recalled working in a simple room in the White House with a shampoo basin, two chairs and plenty of outlets for blow dryers and flat irons. He's not necessarily eager to go back.

"You have all kind of last-minute phone calls, which is extremely hard for someone

who has a large clientele in a salon to drop everything and go," said 57-year-old Portelli, who owns Georgetown's Okyo Salon.

Still, if Obama's hairstyles dazzle the public, having her as a client would be a public relations coup for any salon. Nuri Yurt of Georgetown's Toka Salon attracted attention after he began styling Laura Bush's hair in 2005. Earlier this year, Vogue magazine called him one of the country's best colorists for brunettes.

"It's permanent advertising, if you will, for the salon," Portelli said.

From the stylists' perspective, Obama doesn't need much help — they describe her hair as classic in style, healthy and free-spirited.

For election night, Michael "Rahni" Flowers of Van Cleef Hair Studio in Chicago — Obama's stylist since she was 18 — did her hair. And for the Democratic National Convention, Obama turned to Chicago-native Johnny Wright of Frederic Fekkai's Los Angeles salon.

If an out-of-towner gets the assignment, it would disappoint locals like Cober-Blake, lawyer-turned-owner of D.C.'s Soul Day Spa and Salon. The 37-year-old said she's excited about the possibility of having Obama experience the services at Soul, where she said they "treat everyone like a Michelle Obama."

Harley, of Keith Harley Hair & Scalp Clinic in Arlington, Va., submitted his

resume a month ago.

"It would be the highlight of my career," said 39-year-old Harley, who styles such high-profile Washington women as Debra Lee, chief executive of Black Entertainment Television. "It would be an honor."

And like her fashion, Obama's hairstyles probably will be scrutinized, as has happened with other first ladies.

"The thing about being the first lady, you're only as fashionable as your last picture," said Dennis Roche, 58, of D.C.'s Roche Salon, which has African-American-hair experts he said could style Obama. "This is kind of risky because of the fact that we all have bad hair days..."

Inauguration

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pand capacity for Obama's swearing-in ceremony beyond the 240,000 tickets allotted, and inaugural aides declined to release the slate of balls this week because the details have not been completed.

But some high-profile names are emerging as hosts of balls that have been announced. Music legend Dionne Warwick will reportedly host The American Music Inaugural Ball. Oscar winner Louis Gossett Jr. will host the Purple Ball. And former Vice President Al Gore is the honorary chair of the Green Inaugural Ball on Jan. 19.

Hollywood and music industry celebrities are expected to be well-represented during the history-making Obama inauguration.

The phalanx of superstars from movies and television will include Oprah Winfrey, Spike Lee, Scarlett Johansen, Chris Rock, Chris Tucker, Ron Howard, Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins. They are just a few of dozens of stars who will attend official and unofficial parties and balls in Washington, D.C.

And there may be even more music greats lined up to perform at formal concerts and informal jam sessions all over the District.

Rumors are swirling that both Beyonce Knowles and Mary J. Blige will perform in concerts as well as Knowles' husband, hip-hop superstar Jay-Z.

John Legend, an ardent Obama supporter and Jennifer Hudson, a Chicago native also are odds-on favorites to perform during the inaugural festivities.

Other stars rumored to perform include will.i.am, who produced an all-star music video honoring Obama, Seal, Cyndi Lauper and Melissa Etheridge.

The president-elect himself is expected to attend dozens of events during his four-day inaugural celebration.

But many of the A-list entertainers and celebrities who want to be a part of history may suffer the same fate as the millions of "regular" inauguration attendees — finding somewhere to stay since hotel rooms in the District are sold out.

Additional information provided by AFRO staff writers. Sean Yoes writes for the Afro-American Newspapers.

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Your Horoscope Says... Dec. 25-31

ARIES

Your careless ways with money are going to be apparent this week. Financial mistakes you've made in the past will be especially painful. Don't conceal the pain from yourself. It is a warning that you should take steps to prevent future financial crisis.

Soul Affirmation: I let my friendships guide my way.

Lucky Numbers: 13, 22, 35

TAURUS

Take advantage of the great weather and spend time outdoors enjoying and relaxing with Mother Nature. Learn a new sport, and spend time with family and friends. Don't take travel matters into your own hands. Seek a professional who will be able to plan a wonderful vacation for you without breaking your bank. Cook up some goodies for your loved ones.

Soul Affirmation: I change who I am by changing where I am going.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 12, 23

GEMINI

Stay positive, don't let negative people get inside your head. You know that things will work out well. Ease rapidly away from anyone who is a naysayer. During the week, things may seem hard at times but soon life will be filled with fun. Enjoy!

Soul Affirmation: The slowness of my week gives me time to refresh my energy.

Lucky Numbers: 15, 26, 36

CANCER

The bond that you established with your spiritual side works well in your relationship with a special person. Speak of the reality of the intangible qualities of life. Your lover will understand. Keep attention on the financial matters you've been dealing with.

Soul Affirmation: I obey the rules this week and avoid hassles.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 14, 24

LEO

The link that you've established with your spiritual self will be strengthened by the people who come into your life this week. This week is a week for seriousness about a relationship. Discuss your deepest thoughts with others. They'll understand and thank you for sharing intimate parts of yourself.

Soul Affirmation: Faith keeps me calm in the storms of life.

Lucky Numbers: 44, 49, 51

VIRGO

You've done some of your own love homework. Hopefully, you've had an opportunity to learn a new way of seeing the world and in that way you've found a way of loving that is more natural for you. The combination of sexiness and joyful focus can create you a wonderful love experience.

Soul Affirmation: I get joy from giving good things.

Lucky Numbers: 11, 17, 37

LIBRA

Share in the glory of your friend who has been recognized for outstanding work. Plan a small get-together to celebrate the occasion. Your time will come, and you will be placed on the pedestal. Your intimacy radar is sensitive. Watch out for a new romance that might come along. Expect the unexpected! You will be pleasantly surprised!

Soul Affirmation: Love is easier than breathing.

Lucky Numbers: 16, 30, 50

SCORPIO

You've done a lot of things in life that no one has agreed with at the beginning. Finding agreement this week will be difficult, but it should not deter you from moving forward. Feeling sorry for your loneliness will discolor what you are doing. Be happy that you are alone.

Soul Affirmation: I get joy from giving good things.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 10, 31

SAGITTARIUS

Eternal optimist, eternity is now. Get in touch with your hopefulness and be a beacon to others. Try not to be taken in by promises made by others or promises you've made to yourself. Concerning your own affairs, avoid contemplating lofty subjects and seeking long-range solutions.

Soul Affirmation: Time is the greatest peacemaker of them all.

Lucky Numbers: 14, 28, 39

CAPRICORN

Some say optimism is fantasy. Suppose the good thing you're optimistic about never comes. This week you'll know that the joy of anticipating it is joy enough. Just the certainty of coming goodness is present goodness. The joy of tomorrow is available this week.

Soul Affirmation: This week is the week the Lord has made. I rejoice in it.

Lucky Numbers: 22, 36, 38

AQUARIUS

You might be looking into the buying or selling of a piece of property, and this week seems to be a favorable week for this type of negotiation. Be careful with the intricacies of the matter. Pay attention to details or it could cost you a great deal later.

Soul Affirmation: I care deeply about the feelings of others.

Lucky Numbers: 11, 21, 35

PISCES

What a blessed week this will be. Spend it meditating on all that God has given you. This week think hard about some form of worship. Curtis Mayfield wrote a song called "Who Do You Love?" Someone should write one called "How Do You Love?" For your love lesson, the second song would be the one you should sing.

Soul Affirmation: New intuitions create new plans and a new cast of characters.

Lucky Numbers: 7, 16, 25