

# Restuarant puts community first

New Visions of Africa looks to change the community by giving food to the hungry

By Brian Shurney

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Reuniting the Hayti community is Kasib Abdullah's vision.

Kasib opened his restaurant, New Visions of Africa, in 2004 with his former partners Raheem Muhammad and Rasheed Muhammad. The restaurant is located on 1306 Fayetteville St. in Durham. Today, Kasib runs the store on his own.

New Visions serves free food to people in the community three days a week, delivers food and sells cheap and healthy meals. But the restaurant's primary purpose is to unite the community.

"When people sit down and break bread together," Kasib says. "It brings out a certain stillness in them that god has blessed everyone with."

Kasib was raised in northern New Jersey under the Nation of Islam, an African American movement promoting black separatism—the practice of African-American people isolating themselves economically. Kasib moved to Durham in 1995.

Kasib and his former business partners opened New Visions as a wholesome restaurant where people could come together and build community.

"Many African American businesses around here sell tobacco and alcohol," he says. "We're trying to bring positive change. Our philosophy is to steer the community back towards self-sufficiency."

New Visions serves the Hayti community, a group of mostly African American and Latino people that were once part of Black Wall Street. LEARN NC calls Black Wall Street "the hub for African American business activity" in early 20th century Durham.

André White, a New Visions regular who's been working in the Hayti District for 10 years, says he appreciates the restaurant and what Kasib has done for the area.

"Mr. Kasib came out with healthy \$5 meal deals that could compete with \$5 footlong subs from Subway and KFC's \$5



Kasib Abdullah utilizes the space in front of his restaurant for pop-up markets. (Photo by Brian Shurney)

meals," André says. "Everyone knows Mr. Kasib's got a big heart. I like the vibe, too – the jazz music playing and the community in the restaurant."

A sense of community is what Kasib is focused on creating.

"We were all raised in community life," he says. "Now it's, 'I've got mine, and you gotta get yours.' It used to be that everyone had a piece of the pie."

According to Kasib, the store's name, New Visions of Africa, comes from his desire to reconnect the Hayti community.

"We are the Africans of America," he says. "We're not ashamed of our history. Right now, a lot of African Americans don't want to be associated with our history. Once we give people a self-awareness of who they are and where they came from, it will give them a sense of pride."

Kasib does most of the work for the restaurant, but he relies on volunteers, government programs and donations to serve anyone who needs food. He says many people who want to help find him through VolunteerMatch, a service that helps people look up nonprofits and charity events in their area.

"We stay afloat by the grace of god," he says. "I also deliver cakes as my side-hustle to help me stay alive."

Kasib also founded Believers United for Progress, an organization for building

a stronger community in Hayti. He's still working on creating the Hayti Organizing and Developing Center, a proposed multi-purpose space where different nonprofits could teach trade, hold courses on parenting and provide shelter.

In the interest of helping wholesome businesses, Kasib has a space outside where pop-up markets can sell their goods.

"We want to remind people that there's life!" he says. "This is one of the things that reminds people that there's life in the community – when there's trade."

A traditional African garment and soap shop, Tushea, has operated outside of New Visions.

"We do hair and skin cream, African black soap – no artificial things or alcohol," says Chris, a co-owner who did not want to disclose his last name. "Everything that's in it, you can say the name of." Chris says he is grateful for what Kasib does for local businesses.

"Giving us the opportunity to be a pop-up market," he says, "he's helped us make what we're doing worth doing."

Kasib plans on continuing to serve the Hayti community, even if it will be a struggle.

"I won't cry over spilled milk," he says.

"I want to know how we can replenish the bottle."

*"Our philosophy is to steer the community back towards self-sufficiency" -Kasib Abdullah*