



WWW.MAKECHARLOTTEWEIRD.COM

A message for all of Charlotte to see: Weird is wonderful

*Creator makes it her mission to nurture
the quirks that lurk in the Queen City*

BY EMILY A. BENTON
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Charlotte can be so ... so normal, with bank buildings rising above clean, tree-lined sidewalks, big sports arenas and spreading suburbs.

But tucked into the cracks and corners, Charlotte also harbors a little bit of the weird.

Now www.MakeCharlotteWeird.com - launched in March - embraces, exposes and promotes all things weird in the Queen City.

Before you mark her as the enemy for her flaming red hair, mismatched clothing and polka-dotted car, just know that Make Charlotte Weird creator Little Shiva isn't out to set two worlds apart.

"In the 'creative' communities, I often hear terms such as 'yuppies' or 'them,'" she said. "I'm trying to get over

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF LITTLE SHIVA

Little Shiva (below right) and friends from www.MakeCharlotteWeird.com.

Web site creator nurtures quirks of Queen City

Weird from IE

the 'us versus them' mentality ... it's not about artists versus the bankers."

On her site, Shiva has selected musicians, activists, artists, actors, fashionistas, writers, gender-benders and inventors, some folks fitting into multiple categories.

Each in the eclectic collage gives his/her/its own interpretation of the bizarre, but Shiva lives by this definition:

"I could be called weird because I don't really conform to any particular status quo, not even a sub-culture status quo," Shiva said. "I just sort of listen to my own voice - that's what weird is - expressing it and living it."

The Web site allows Charlotte's self-proclaimed weirdos to communicate better.

Ryan Miller, 30, a techno and indie rock DJ for private parties and clubs who is featured on the site, said the Internet in general has been a good way to reach a larger audience, even beyond weirdos.

"We're talking about a commercial city; we need to speak this town's language more so than being completely esoteric," said Miller, who takes the name "Emperor Slubby" on Shiva's site. "We need to try to embrace (newcomers) and encourage them to be original and support local artists. Otherwise, we seem cliquish from the outside."

How the site got started

Make Charlotte Weird was inspired by similar Web sites (KeepAustinWeird.com was the first) that capture cities' bizarre sides.

Brooke Edge with the City Committee dropped the idea of creating a Weird site to Shiva. Edge worked on the Hot Jobs/Cool Communities initiative in 2005. The group argued that Charlotte needed a "creative class" in order to attract a hip, young work force.

Shiva decided to use the slogan "Make Charlotte Weird" rather than "Keep Charlotte Weird" because she thinks Charlotte's obscure elements are not as visible as those other cities - but she also bought the KeepCharlotteWeird.com Web address just in case.

The Web site attests to another sentiment: Charlotte isn't weird enough.

"Fun in Charlotte is kind of like canned laughter on TV," said Dot Jackson, 73, who is also featured on Make Charlotte Weird. She was an artist in Charlotte before moving to Pickens, S.C., to work in nonprofit arts education. She was also wrote for the Observer, was on the original board of the Charlotte Regional Ballet and is a Novello Festival author.

She said she's happy to have seen Charlotte grow, with more and more people uptown, but still thinks it needs more life.

"I think (Charlotte) has all the potential of being a place that's a lot of fun to be in," she said. "I'm just not sure if it's there yet."

Shiva and others seem to think a few more page views will help.

"Charlotte is weird in a conservative way," said Linda Vista, 55, a local activist who is trying to organize a Weird Parade in 2007. "But that's why I think the site is so fantastic. It gets the word out about it."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LITTLE SHIVA AND WWW.MAKECHARLOTTEWEIRD.COM

Little Shiva, creator of www.MakeCharlotteWeird.com, drives a polka-dotted car with flowers on the bumper. "I just sort of listen to my own voice - that's what weird is - expressing it and living it," she says.

The Little Shiva File

Age: 42.

Name: Little Shiva was first called "Little Shiva" by a stranger on College Street who was commenting on her bindi makeup. She kept the name, and declines to give her legal name, because the big Shiva is the Hindu goddess of destruction, who paves a path for new things.



Little Shiva

Residency: Moved to Charlotte from New York City in 1999 to take care of her aging grandmother. Little Shiva happily reports that Gran, at age 93, is fine and quite the firecracker.

Occupation: Graphic designer and creative consultant. She owns gogopop: bold design for a bland world (www.gogopop.com).

Creations: MakeCharlotteWeird.com, Q-Z (Queen 'Zine). Designs have appeared in Uptown Magazine, Rift Magazine, C.A.S.T. programs and the ECA Newsletter (Elizabeth neighborhood). Details: www.littleshivacom.

Activities: Visible Trash Society, founder; Z-Access Television, segment producer; Metrolina AIDS Project, contributor; Urban Ministries, volunteer.

Favorite Web sites (other than her own): www.pbs.org/independentlens/offthemap, www.ocularart.com, www.queencityindie.com.

Weird factor: Drives the "Dotmobile," a polka-dot painted car. Married to transgendered Jenn Jacobsen. Has been known to wear plastic grasshoppers on her head in professional settings. — EMILY A. BENTON

On the Web Site

WWW.MAKECHARLOTTEWEIRD.COM

Weirdos: In the vein of "Inside the Actors' Studio," Little Shiva gives the same Q&A with various characters in the Queen City.

Sandbox: Directs to a flickr.com group where Charlotteans post pictures of weirdness around town.

Current weirdness: Lists and links noting areas that don't the weird.

Love letters: Notes from people who love Charlotte's weird side. One letter reads: "My first memory of Charlotte was driving through it in 1983. While looking at the skyline, I noticed that I felt no soul to the city. Nada, zip, zilch. It was a complete poker face."

Weird store: Been to the site, now you can buy the T-shirt (\$20). Bumper stickers for the cause are \$5.

Historic weirdness: Memorialized are weird havens such as Fat City, Pat's Tavern and the Pterodactyl.

The ad rail: Ad rates for the site range from \$5 per month up to \$300 a year, depending on the size of ads - a deal that Shiva says she cut for small businesses. She doubts she'll raise much money from the project; only six ads are currently paying. If she does, though, she said she'd pay herself or fund other projects promoting weirdness in Charlotte. — EMILY A. BENTON