

# Back stage at the Ebony Fashion Fair

By Kathryn Hall Bogle

Backstage at Ebony Fashion Fair is a beehive - under control.

Robert H. Fentress, a vice president in direction of Circulation for the Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., is in charge of backstage. There he is Production Coordinator for Ebony Fashion Fair.

Fentress has been in charge since the early days of the Ebony Fashion Fair, and he plans to keep right on doing what he so much enjoys.

Fentress organizes the show's itinerary. Organizing to Fentress means checking out the reality and other qualifications of each local sponsor. He checks out (months before hand) the place where the local sponsor expects the

show to be staged - for the stage must have the necessary dimensions for exact timing and pacing of the show. The lighting must be adequate and modern, technicians must be available and dressing rooms must meet qualifications.

Then, if Fentress and the show are to be in your neighborhood, and you can accept the date he offers - you may have the show.

The show this year, has been in Anchorage, Alaska. It came from there, by air, to Portland. By bus, the show and personnel went from Portland to Seattle. By air, the show goes from Seattle to Denver. It will again resort to its Greyhound for shorter hops after Denver until mid-May. They disband then for the season. In all, 174 shows.

Fentress keeps an eye out on the

million dollar wardrobe to see that it is packed and unpacked under tight security controls everywhere. He watches over the well being of the entire staff. In Portland, someone became ill and Fentress obtained the services of a physician. It happens once in a while.

Fentress watches the individual performances of models, and he tries to keep the young people from getting too homesick during their long months on the road away from friends and family. He is concerned about them.

Staff is fairly constant. "Models are replaced every year," says he. "Only two out of every year's crop are kept as holdovers for a new season." This keeps new faces and the crisp freshness for which Ebony Fashion Fair is noted.

New models are signed on back in Chicago, not on the road. Ebony Magazine picks up the tab for air-flight for personal interviews once an applicant has her bid to enter the highly competitive selection process. Female models ages run from 18 to 23 generally. Popular size: size 8; average height, 5-8" 5-10."

"The Ebony Fashion Fair, once playing to nearly solid Black audiences, is now numbering more and more whites in its patrons - even in the deep south," says the veteran showman Fentress. "Audiences are drawing in more younger people too, we have noticed," Fentress added.

"We started with ten cities and now we play 174 shows in the full seasons. We have a fall show and a springtime show with a Christmas break in between.

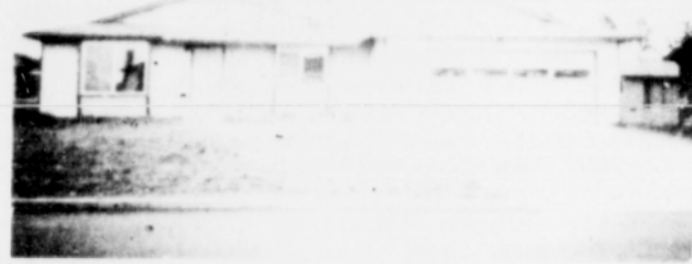
"Our future looks bright for adding a few more local sponsors," Fentress says with satisfaction. "We offer a good bargain to the public. They get to see a good show, they get a subscription to a fine magazine, and they realize they are contributing to a good charity for each ticket they buy. Now where else can such a bargain be found?" There is no available answer to that one. Where else, indeed?

"Now" Fentress muses, "If we could get people to put their ticket stubs where we can get them, to fill their subscription preferences promptly."



Link Alda Ruth Monroe, Co-chairperson for Ebony Fashion Fair, admires Ombre Lame' gown worn by Fashion Fair model. (Photo: Richard Brown)

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