



Desert jewels

**Local dancers land part on
Fox series**

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You don't have to walk the red carpet to be a celebrity. Jessica "Ameelah" McDaniel and Angel "Arella" Schlotterbeck prove that.

The women are bellydancers with Desert Jewels Belly Dance -- and known locally for their performances at Little Greek restaurant in Alexandria. McDaniel and Schlotterbeck perform locally as part of a trio -- which includes Alexis Alpha -- and they typically get a full house.

"When I get Ameelah, I'm reserved in advance," said Little Greek owner Esam Alnajjar.

But in September, they'll receive national recognition with a spot on the Fox series "K-Ville."

The part came as a surprise to McDaniel, who had originally auditioned in October for a dancing part in "My Mom's New Boyfriend" starring Antonio Banderas and Meg Ryan. She was passed over for that part, but later was offered a part in "The Last Lullaby" starring Tom Sizemore and Sasha Alexander.

After that, she was offered a part in the Jessica Simpson movie "Major Movie Star," which was filmed in Louisiana. Unfortunately, McDaniel couldn't accept that part, as she and her troupe were to be at a workshop and competition in Fort Worth, Texas, during filming. Incidentally, the Desert Jewels won the "People's Choice" award in that competition.

But McDaniel soon received another call -- this time for a belly dancing part in "K-Ville," a series about life in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The casting director wanted McDaniels and one other dancer. McDaniels brought with her to New Orleans her friend and longtime dance partner Schlotterbeck.

"They told us to come dressed. Come ready," McDaniel said. So they did. And they were chosen to be the featured extras in a crowd of street performers in Jackson Square.

"I think it's exciting because they're filming it documenting the way things are in New Orleans -- and it being so close to home," Schlotterbeck said.

But the pair quickly learned filming a television show isn't all fun and games. "When they film it, there's no music -- only what's in your head," McDaniel said. And they had to dance that music non-stop for about seven hours. "It was hot and exhausting," McDaniel said. But worth it.

"Things have just been getting fantastic for us," McDaniel said. "You work so hard and then you finally see a payoff."

The rest of us can see the payoff when the episode airs 8 p.m. Sept. 24 on WNTZ Fox 48.

Sharon Rachal, WNTZ's general manager, wasn't aware that two local women were going to be on the show, but was ecstatic when she heard the news. "We expect so much more from reality programs," Rachal said. "We expect to see our local singers on 'American Idol,' so when it happens with scripted programs it seems extra-special."