

## Taylor Thomas

*Radio personality Taylor Thomas deepens her community commitment with Oji, a home-accents business with an African American flair.*

**T**aylor Thomas hit on the perfect Swahili name for her Raleigh-based business: *Oji*, meaning “female gift bearer.” The title aptly fits the entrepreneur, 29, who designs pillows, place mats, napkins, table runners, Christmas stockings, and tree skirts—home accessories with African American flair.

A child of a military family, Taylor grew up in London and the Philippines. She attended the University of Maryland at College Park, first focusing on business administration but graduating with a B.A. in speech communication. During college, she interned at Black Entertainment Television in Washington, D.C., as well as a number of stations. After graduation, Taylor wanted a change from big-city life.

“When I visited this area prior to making my decision to come here, it just gave me that feeling of home,” explains Taylor, who moved here six years ago. Now, she serves as on-air radio news director of an urban contemporary station (K97.5’s *Morning Show*) and an inspiration/Christian music station (FM103.9’s and AM1490’s *The Light*). As part of her duties, the young radio star spreads goodwill in the community—a “Taylor-made” task. She speaks to area schools on such topics as health issues and drug avoidance. Her community commitment continues with the two-year-old *Oji*. “We give



In the designs she sells through *Oji*, Taylor uses hand-woven material from Ghana in vibrant yellows, greens, browns, reds, blacks, and occasionally blues.



10% of the proceeds to youth organizations,” she explains.

“With my job, I work a lot in areas often forgotten by those living above and beyond the poverty line,” she says. “Sometimes people think that everything is A-okay because the economy is okay. But I see what these kids are going through.” She started the business with her own \$6,000 savings and she’s kept costs down by word-of-mouth advertising, which targets *Oji*’s audience at such events as Cary’s annual Kwanzaa celebration. The reasonably priced accents, most well under \$100, are sold at Artful Greetings, an African American gallery in Durham, and on the Internet.

While Taylor focuses on Raleigh, her mom, Shirley McCants, runs *Oji* production in Maryland, where she lives with Taylor’s father, Roosevelt.

Taylor began *Oji* after searching for a black baby doll for her niece, Zakyia. The store she visited had sold

out of African American dolls—except one unwanted, gaudy model.

“It looked like someone closed their eyes and said, ‘This is an African doll. They wear lots of colors; let’s just throw it on,’” Taylor says. “It was ridiculous. You could clearly tell that no one from that country, nor anyone who knows the African American community, had anything to do with that product.” Also, Taylor had searched in vain for authentic African accents for the home she shares with husband Warren McNair.

The result of these disappointing findings? *Oji*—its products and its commitment. “I want people to see *Oji*,” offers Taylor, “and have that be synonymous with a company that’s giving back.”

*Nancy Dorman-Hickson*

Check out the company’s Web site at [ojiinc.com](http://ojiinc.com), call (919) 266-7776, or write 908 Springfield Commons Drive, PB116, Raleigh, NC 27609.