Who's afraid of Gertrude Baker?

Actor, feminist, activist is a formidable figure, but friends know her softer, sensitive side

By Marina Pisano

A dinner honoring Gertrude Baker is an idea long overdue, many say. So, why hasn't it happened sooner?

Two minutes with this actor, feminist, community activist, retired Army lieutenant colonel, nurse and Vietnam War veteran, and one possible answer leaps to mind: People were afraid to ask her.

Truth is, in this laid-back city in a sun-baked region where making nice is the social norm, a strong, formidable-looking African-American woman from Brooklyn with a penchant for straight-up candor and zero tolerance for petty trivialities scares a lot of people.

"I know," she says, seated one afternoon in the living room of her comfortable home in a north-central neighborhood. "I know I scare people, but I'm not sure why that is. I'm not violent or anything. Maybe it's because I tell them the truth. I say, if you don't want to hear it, don't ask. Maybe it's because I don't take any crap."

Bingo.

There is a soft, caring, sensitive side; friends say. And, visitors to her home get a glimpse of her whimsical streak in the collection of about 50 dolls of color, many of them gifts, which she displays on the sofa and end table.

"Let's just say she does not suffer fools easily," observes actor Bob Thor, who shares both a love of theater and a military nursing background with Baker. During a spirited lunch with arts supporter Baker and some pals at the Liberty Bar, author and close confidante Sandra Cisneros drums on the table and feeds the fearsome legend.

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Tribute to Gertrude Baker

What: Reception, dinner and dance honoring community activist, arts supporter. Benefits the Esperanza Center.

Where: Esperanza Center, 902 San Pedro Ave.

Admission: Reception/dinner, dance and commemorative gift, $50; reception/dinner and dance, $100; dinner and dance, $75; dance, $25.
Gertrude Baker stands on the stage at the Carver Community Cultural Center. Baker is honored Saturday at a fundraiser for the Esparanza Center. Baker is on the Esparanza advisory board and the Alamo Theatre Arts Council board.

The page is from the San Antonio Express-News, dated August 17, 1997, under the section "Lifestyle." The article seems to be about Gertrude Baker, mentioning her contributions to the community, particularly in connection with the Esparanza Center. The text also includes information about a fundraiser event organized by the Esparanza Center and Baker's involvement in various arts and cultural initiatives in San Antonio, Texas.