



by Janelle Harris

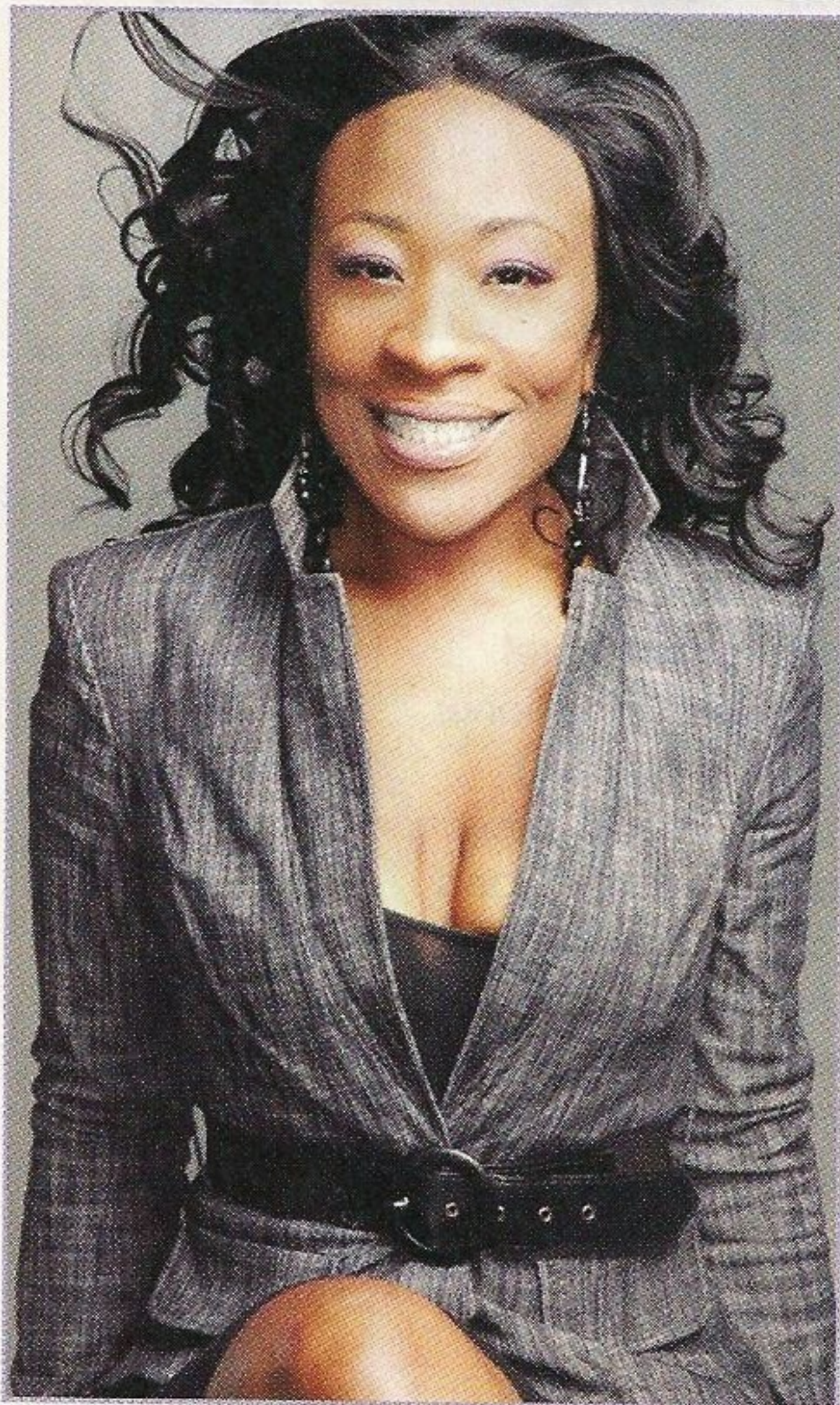
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Hats Off to Women Wearing Different Hats!

ChiQ Simms

Founder and CEO, DIVAdend Entertainment and Public Relations



When Hurricane Katrina devastated historic New Orleans, it could have also devastated the career aspirations of its native daughter, ChiQ Simms. It could have decimated her vision for her then 4-year-old business, DIVAdend Entertainment and Public Relations. Instead, the worst natural disaster in recent American history forced ChiQ to relocate to Atlanta and show everyone—including herself—the kind of tenacity

that weathers storms. “When I moved, I had three outfits, my PR file, my Social Security Card and my birth certificate,” she recalled. “Everything I did, I did from a FEMA hotel room. But I knew how to put together events, how to raise money and how to get the press’s attention.” With those qualities under her fabulous designer belt, the former YWCA development director and single mother of one put down roots in The A and let competitors know, come hell or high water, she was open for business.

In fact, ChiQ cut her entrepreneurial teeth by putting a positive spin on adversity. As the crisis communications guru behind Southern hip-hop artists like C-Murder, Mystikal, Juvenile and Soulja Slim, she guided her clients through tribulations and trials—literally. ChiQ’s experience as the media mastermind behind so many rappers’ careers and her background in philanthropy inspired Professional Public Relations 101 (PPR101 for short), a seminar that travels to 10 cities nationwide to teach aspiring artists how to efficiently manage their publicity. “I’ve taken my brand and expanded it to teach others to do this themselves and do it properly,” she said. “I do a media training class on the red carpet and bring in editors to talk to artists about how to approach them.”

Though she is looking very successful—DIVAdend has offices in New Orleans, Atlanta and Las Vegas, and a Dallas office is in the works—ChiQ maintains a humble perspective. “If I have to walk somewhere, I will do that for my business. If I have to take public transportation somewhere, I will do that for my clients.” But the biggest challenge for this go-getter, and for so many other ladies in the entertainment industry, isn’t willingness to sacrifice. “I’m a woman, so either men are trying to f*** you or they’re trying to f*** you, in both senses of the word,” she said. “In one way, they’ll try to tell you that you’re not credible enough or have enough intelligence, or they’re trying to romance you, versus seeing you as another professional. So that’s the biggest challenge—having to deal with the good ol’ boy network and you’re a sexy young woman.” Sex and sex appeal notwithstanding, ChiQ’s reputation for being a PR powerhouse keeps spreading—and producing major DIVAdends. **S**

Photo by Derek Blanks