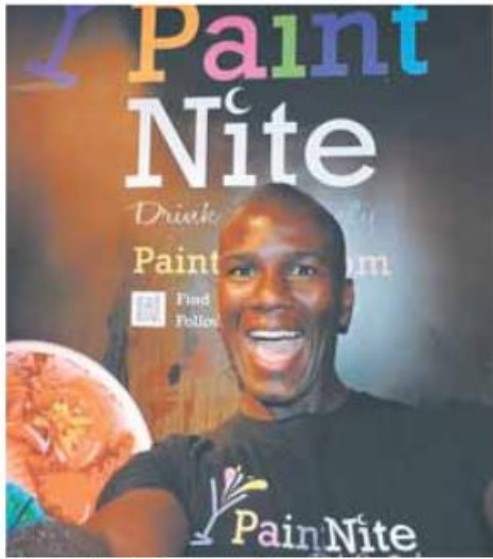


AUGUST 20-26, 2015

ENTERTAINMENT



City of Fairfax resident Luc Atangana runs Paint Nite events throughout Northern Virginia.



These women proudly display their finished paintings.

# Social Painting Can Be an Art

**City of Fairfax resident mixes food, drink, art lessons and fun.**

BY BONNIE HOBBS  
THE CONNECTION

**W**hen Luc Atangana came to the U.S. from his native Cameroon, Africa, little did he expect to someday make his living as an artist. But that's exactly what the City of Fairfax resident is doing.

He's now a Paint Nite licensee, bringing the joy of painting to others by putting on Paint Nite events throughout Northern Virginia. And for this exuberant 24-year-old, the sky's the limit.

"I'd taken art classes in high school and college and was told that I had talent," said Atangana. "But I never took it seriously."

As a teenager in 2006, he already spoke English because Cameroon is bilingual. But he left his home and came to America to get a good education and play basketball, at which he excelled. He attended Paul VI High, graduating in 2008. He later graduated from Christopher Newport University, where he continued playing basketball and obtained a degree in psychology.

"I still intend to go back to grad school and have my own, private practice, at some point," said Atangana. Meanwhile, his college basketball coach – who's a cousin of the co-founder and CEO of Paint Nite – introduced him to the painting-party event.

"Paint Nite uses painting as a platform that allows artists like myself to get involved in what they love to do – and earn a living from it – without having to spend extraordinary amounts of money," explained Atangana. And these artists pass on their knowledge to others – but instead of doing it in a classroom setting, they turn the lessons into social events at restaurants and bars.

"Some people haven't painted since el-

ementary school, and others have never done it before, because most people don't get to be artistic as they get older," he said. "But at Paint Nite, they reminisce about how much fun it was and see how much fun it is now – especially while eating and drinking at a bar or restaurant. They can do it at the same time."

**DEPENDING ON THE VENUE'S CAPACITY**, each event attracts 30-60 people. "We're now doing 10-12 events a week and we're constantly growing," said Atangana. "For example, the first week of August, we did 12 events, and the second week, 15 events."

The cost is \$45/person and participants must be at least 21. Tickets to each event are purchased at [www.paintnite.com](http://www.paintnite.com). "We also have a deal through Groupon and do advertising on social media," said Atangana. "And we get a lot of repeat and word-of-mouth customers. One woman – who's an accountant and spends her days in a cubicle, crunching numbers – has been to 15 Paint Nites. She says it's a great outlet and stress reliever and something that's fun."

All the materials are provided. "People just have to bring a positive attitude and be willing to have a good time," said Atangana. "Classes are about two hours and we usually have an assistant with art talent to help out."

"I bring a sample painting – a landscape, flowers, etc. – that people can try to recreate," he continued. "But if they want to change or add to it in some way, they can. We'll walk them through it, step by step, but we also encourage them to create something entirely different, if they want."

Atangana said Paint Nite is more like a party than a class. "We focus on making sure that each person leaves learning at least one, new thing and having a good time," he explained. "People really seem to like it. They enjoy the experience, tell their friends and want to come back, so it's been well-received."

Less than a year after becoming a Paint Nite licensee and artist, he's gone from

working by himself to managing a team of nine employees and selling thousands of dollars in event tickets each month. The job has also taught him how to publicize and grow the business via entrepreneurship, branding, social media and networking.

Truthfully, said Atangana, "I don't know if I'd be happier as a professional athlete. It's been an absolute blast – challenging and enjoyable. It's also been a learning experience, since I'm doing the marketing, hiring artists to assist me and managing staff."

He said the various venues benefit, as well, from hosting these events. "Paint Nite exposes people to new restaurants they haven't been to before," said Atangana. "And the restaurants also get return customers."

**MOST EVENTS** start at 7 p.m. and, although people may buy their tickets the same day, advance purchases are generally better. "If people come to the bar or restaurant and we're not full, they can buy tickets on the spot," said Atangana. "But we usually sell out, so we encourage them to get their tickets early, online."

A few of the local, upcoming, Paint Nite events will be held:

- ◆ Monday, Aug. 24, Baladna Restaurant & Lounge, Fairfax;
- ◆ Monday, Aug. 24, On the Border, Fair Oaks Mall;
- ◆ Wednesday, Aug. 26, The Greene Turtle, Fairfax;
- ◆ Thursday, Aug. 27, Joe's Crab Shack, Fairfax.

The toughest part of his job, said Atangana, is keeping up with the growing demand, as more and more restaurants want to get involved. So his challenge is to find more artists to run the events – but it's a good problem to have, since it means business is thriving.

What he enjoys the most, he said, is "After the event, seeing people leave happy with something they created and tell me they never thought they could paint something like that. I'm also happy when they just want to come back because they enjoyed the experience so much."