

## **New organization saves it soles**

Shoe collecting hobby prompts students to start group on campus

By Ben Liu (Published in the Spartan Daily on Nov 8, 2005)

"Shoes define who a person is," said Demetrius Brown, a senior international business student at San Jose State University.

Brown plays forward for the Spartans men's basketball team and his shoes help define his life and love of basketball.

Brown is a member of a newly created club, called Soul 2 Sole, whose purpose is to inform people about the popularity of the shoe culture and for collectors to gather together and share their passion.

The club was started by Seth Wollman, a graduate student studying gerontology at SJSU, because he knew there are many people who loved shoes and would want to come together and get involved.

Wollman explains that there is a shoe for everyone. Some people have a preference for a certain type, such as "Jordan," "Dunk" and "Air Force One," which are all Nike shoes. Those who identify with basketball would give preference to "Jordans," but it really just depends on personal preference.

For instance, Wollman and Brown both enjoy playing basketball, and their collections relate to the sport.

Jason Wong, a freshman majoring in kinesiology, used to buy at least two or three pairs of shoes a month, at average costs of \$250 per pair.

Wong said he always tells himself that he will quit buying shoes because they cost too much money, but he finds himself buying more.

"I love the way people stare at my shoes. I like their expressions, it is amusing when they come up to me and ask where I got my shoes," Wong said. "I just like that feeling."

Wollman started collecting shoes at the age of 14 and now has 60 pairs in his collection. His favorite pair is the "Jordan Space Jam", which is featured in the basketball movie "Space Jam".

"I first began collecting shoes in the summer of 1996 at the age of 14, when I purchased my first pairs of 'Air Jordans' - the 'Air Jordan XI Lows' - while visiting my family in New York," Wollman said. "I was of the attitude that shoes were meant to be worn - I argued that that was their role, their function, their purpose."

In 1998, he then decided to stop wearing the shoes he collected because they were getting expensive and were beautiful to look at. He now has some shoes only for collecting and some only for wearing.

"I just wanted to put them on my nightstand," Wollman said. "I knew they would become valuable one day and wanted to cherish them."

However, he does not plan to sell his shoes. He did sell a pair once, but that was the first and only time. He let them go because he really wanted courtside seats to a basketball game featuring the Philadelphia 76ers against the Sacramento Kings.

"I sold my first pair of 'Jordans', in near deadstock condition (brand-new condition), that I bought in 1996 for \$150," Wollman said. "I regret that now, because I probably could get \$300."

Brown, who has been collecting for 14 years, claims that some shoes are ugly because the colors do not look right, but then he thinks about the culture and history behind the shoes.

Aaron Chiang, a freshman majoring in business marketing, claims he once waited overnight in a line to buy a pair of shoes.

"There was a riot, people fought for the shoes," he said.

Wollman said that people get shot over their shoes so they are fortunate to be able to collect.

Many people consider it rather odd for men to collect shoes.

"People have the wrong mindset; many men are into shoes. Fat Joe collects shoes. A lot of rappers and wealthy people have extensive collections," Wollman said.

Soul 2 Sole will hold its first official meeting next semester. The organization will host various guest speakers who are prominent figures within the shoe community, including Alex "Retrokid" Wang of San Jose, creative director for Sole Collector, a bi-monthly guide to shoe-collecting culture, also called sneakerhead, founded in 2003. Wang will serve as one of the club's advisers.

According to Wollman, there is a bond between collectors. They can just sit there and talk about shoes, about the culture and history behind them.

"Shoes have the amazing ability to erase color lines, racial, ethnic and language barriers, and allow people from all corners of the globe the opportunity to congregate and share the passion we all have for shoes," Wollman said. "Whether you call them grips, shoes, trainers, kicks or joints, these things that we put on our feet continue to push the envelope of footwear, style and fashion. It starts in our soul and ends at the sole."