Students dance at Mariani’s on a Thursday night.

UNCP students enjoy a good time at Mariani’s.

It all began with a prayer.

“Come on everybody… Come on everybody… Come on everybody and help me praise him!” These are the lyrics to a song written by Gregory Matthews whose music echoed off the walls of Mariani’s, located in Pembroke on Sunday, Sept. 19.

The Gospel /Coffee House Café at Mariani’s is held twice a month on Sundays. It’s form of entertainment for some community members that also offers spiritual, cultural and economic benefits.

Although the Gospel Café is influenced by the Christian faith, people are encouraged to come and show off their talents by way of spoken word, poetry or singing.

“This is not designed to mimic or mock church, but people should want to experience the atmosphere,” Matthews said. Performances led by the resident band, and the resident singing ensemble, Greg Matthews & Ministry, offer an array of gospel and genre.

The resident ensemble uses more than 15 years of professional singing experience to accompany rising artists with their music material. Some of the members of the ensemble insist that their skills have remained constant from constant rehearsals where practicing, arranging arrangements, monologues, timing and the refinement of blending their voices, tone, timbre and key elements that they describe contributes to their sound and craft.

Community members are encouraged to come out to showcase their talents and participate. During a set break, while scanning the crowd, Matthews said, “When you see people please come up front.” One by one, and in groups of two or more, they arrived to the front, positioned, ready for another set—and the music played on.

Food and something more

With a waterfall inside, a fully functioning upper level where patrons can enjoy their meals, the scene at Mariani’s is one that might be unlike any other business in Pembroke. Alongside the seafood, aged beef and locally grown produce is the owner, Hossein Mariani.

“When this place was built I had an theater in mind. I wanted to bring the idea of a Baltimore style seafood to the area,” Mariani said.

During college night held on Thursdays, D.J. Doc Mike, has said, “Let’s show some love to the Mariani’s girls!”. And the crowd responded with a roar.

“I’ve worked here since May, said Marion Hunt, Mariani’s waitress and volleyball player. “The Gospel Café Night they sent our customers. Some people here would not want to see change,” Mariani said.

Mariani’s is located in ComTech at 26 Commerce Circle, in Pembroke. The restaurant is open from 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Saturdays, and from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sundays. UNCP students receive a 10 percent discount off their meals at Mariani’s.