



PHOTO COURTESY OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Verdell and Otto Rutherford (far right) were among the leaders of Portland civil rights community in the 1940s and 1950s who worked with then-state Rep. Mark O. Hatfield to adopt Oregon's Public Accommodation Act, the 21st state in the union to pass legislation outlawing discrimination in public places.

## A Legacy Preserved

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

was strictly on a volunteer basis, Charlotte Rutherford explains, stating that they were never compensated for their work.

After returning to Portland in the late 1990s from her own career as a civil rights attorney with the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund on the East Coast, the younger Rutherford began the task of clearing through her parents' belongings.

"I didn't really know what was in the boxes, I just had sense enough not to throw them away," Rutherford explains. Eventu-

ally, through the help of friend and former state legislator Avel Gordly, the collection made its way to PSU.

"It has preserved the culture from a specific time period, from the '40s through the '80s," says Rutherford, describing the collection's significance. Rutherford says that this was the height of Portland's black community, "Because after the 90s, people started being dispersed."

The wide variety of content within the Rutherford collection offers a valuable survey of the historic strength of the community, as even items such as dance programs

can offer insight into what neighborhoods in north Portland once contained: "They sold advertisements... So it would show you what black businesses existed, and where they were located, up and down Williams Ave. and up and down Vancouver Ave."

Today, the work of the Rutherford family continues to serve Portland's black population. Two documentaries, "Lift Ev'ry Voice," and "Local Color," both of which were produced by Oregon Public Broadcasting, made extensive use of the material present in the Verdell Burdine and Otto G. Rutherford collection. In addition, a CDC-funded Oregon Health and Science University initiative has taken advantage of the images. The "Sharing History through Active Reminiscence and

Photo-imagery," or SHARP, program is utilizing the extensive nature of the collection to promote community memory building and learn about Alzheimer's risk in African Americans over 55.

In November, Charlotte Rutherford was honored with the Continuing the Legacy Award by the Portland Branch of the NAACP for her efforts preserving and donating the collection to PSU's Library. Rutherford is quick to point out that PSU is always eager to expand its records relating to the history of Oregon's black community, and encourages individuals with potentially noteworthy content to reach out to the university.

Says Rutherford, "It's a snapshot of a period of time that probably doesn't exist like that anywhere else."

**"I've been at the Port for 19 years and have seen the organization change over time. We've embraced diversity in small pockets, but now we're taking it to a grand scale. It will take work, and we need to speak freely."**

At the Port of Portland, we believe in partnerships — with our people and with our community. Right now, our culture team members are working together to create a more equitable and inclusive Port, one that's representative of the city we live in and love. Whether you're seeking employment or contracting opportunities, join us in creating a future with fair treatment and equitable access to opportunity for all.

**We're more than a Port, we're your partner.**



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