

# Righting inequality

*SPIRIT empowers women and girls around issues of gender and race*

by Inga Sorensen

**O**ur goal is to make sure that women and girls have a place at the table every step of the way," says Sandra Davis, lead organizer for the fledgling group Sisters in Portland Impacting Real Issues Together, also known as SPIRIT.

SPIRIT is a new membership organization that aims to empower and develop the leadership skills of low-income women, women of color and girls. The group does so by providing public forums where women and girls can air their issues, by fostering intergenerational links, and by developing the capacity of girls and women to act around issues of gender and race inequity.

SPIRIT, which is a project of the Oakland, Calif.-based Center for Third World Organizing, also plans to challenge "city, county and state institutions to meet the needs of girls and women and their families." Similar projects exist in Denver, Colo., Oakland and Sacramento, Calif.

According to Davis, SPIRIT launched an extensive door-to-door survey in North and Northeast Portland throughout the summer to learn more about the concerns of women and girls. The group also sponsored a series of tea parties in residents' homes and conducted an assessment of existing service providers.

"The three primary areas of concern for women and girls deal with employment and livable wages, affordable housing and safety, both at home and on the streets," says Davis.

Based on the information it gathered, SPIRIT came to the sobering conclusion that the psychological and economic hardships faced by women and their families—who are forced to make difficult economic choices on a daily basis—is given far too little attention. That economic deprivation, more specifically the lack of adequate housing, livable wages, education, jobs and child care, often renders women and their children far more vulnerable to physical violence.

In a 1994 study, the U.S. Department of Justice reported that women in the lowest family income category, less than \$10,000 per year, experienced the highest rates of violent crime. According to SPIRIT, in Oregon close to 300,000—or 45 percent—of employed women work in low-paying

service and administrative support jobs which are often part-time and rarely provide benefits. Minimum wage leaves a family of three nearly \$4,000 under the poverty line. In Oregon, women of color have the lowest incomes and the highest rate of poverty.

Davis says SPIRIT hopes to change that by shining a light on that tough reality and by giving women and girls the tools they need to build brighter futures.

In mid-September, SPIRIT sponsored its first public event—a community speak-out entitled "Building Safe and Powerful Communities Through Honoring Women, Children and Culture"—which attracted close to 100 women and men from various cultural backgrounds. Oregon state Rep. Avel Gordly; Lucius Hicks, chair of the Portland School Board; and a representative from Multnomah County Commission Chair Beverly Stein's office were among those on hand.

The speak-out, says Davis, was designed to give women and girls of all ages and backgrounds a chance to come together and testify about their experiences and the issues that most affect their daily lives.

SPIRIT has set up several committees, including one specifically for young women. Nearly 20 girls between the ages of 13 and 19 are involved in the Young Women's Committee, which has held discussions on issues such as sexual harassment. During a recent committee meeting a self-defense instructor was brought in to teach the young women some basics about protecting oneself from violence.

"I think what sets SPIRIT apart from other organizations is that we firmly believe that women and girls need to be at the table when it comes to the decision-making process. It is a priority for us to ensure that women and girls are present," she says.

SPIRIT welcomes anyone who "believes in positive change for our communities and supports the leadership of women of color and low-income women and girls." Membership dues are \$12 per year, and volunteers are always appreciated.

For more information about SPIRIT, call 335-6919, or write to SPIRIT, 126 NE Alberta St., Portland, 97211.

are \$5-\$20 sliding scale. The event is sponsored by Tateyah Topa (206) 368-9241.

## Party canceled

The Halloween Dance "Fears, Phobias and Fantasies V—Queer Science" was canceled late in September. Organizers cited a lack of sponsorships by major corporations which are crucial to production of the event.

During the past four years, the dance has raised \$45,000 for the Cascade AIDS Project, Esther's Pantry and the Friends of People with AIDS Foundation.

Organizers will endeavor to produce the event next year and encourage individuals who are interested in helping to call Blackout Productions at 236-1091.

Renée LaChance



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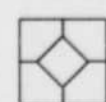
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## Spokesman for the prophecies

In the early 1940s, four men were chosen by the traditional Hopi leaders to carry the message of the Hopi people. Thomas Banyacya is the remaining messenger of the four. He has traveled the world since 1948 warning all who would listen that civilization is pressing too far into technological development without remembering to remain in balance with the Earth.

All native peoples and organizations, church groups, social change organizations and individuals working toward peace and a world in balance are invited to hear the message of the Hopi people. Thomas Banyacya will be speaking at the Westminster Presbyterian Church, 1624 NE Hancock St., at 7 pm Friday, Nov. 3. Tickets