

Police Meet the Heat event draws fire

BY ANN-DERRICK GAILLOT
STAFF WRITER

Attendees to a fundraiser at the Portland Police Training Center in Northeast Portland the morning of Friday, April 1, were greeted by a group of protesters opposed to what they saw as an exclusionary event insensitive to Portland's low-income, minority and mental health communities. The event, called "Meet the Heat", was a fundraiser for the non-profit organizations Portland Police Foundation and Citizens Crime Commission, an affiliate organization of the Portland Business Alliance's charitable branch.

According to the Meet the Heat event promotional material, for \$1000 invitees received a "never-been-done before, exclusive look into the challenges, the danger, and the successes of Portland Police officers," as well as the chance to meet members of the police force and dogs from the K-9 unit. The price of admission also included memberships into the two benefitting organizations.

Former police chief and current interim executive director of the Citizens Crime Commission Mike Reese told Street Roots that Meet the Heat is based on the organization's past community academies, in which community and civic leaders are invited to go through a simulation of police training and "hear from the police chief on 21st century issues around policing." Reese stated that in addition to the fundraiser ticket

holders, youth from the Boys and Girls Club would be in attendance.

"Our invitation must have gotten lost in the mail," protest organizer and NAACP Portland branch President Jo Ann Hardesty told protesters gathered outside of the year-and-a-half old training facility. In a public statement released that morning, Hardesty objected to the event marketing's "glorifying police violence" as well as its potential draw on public resources.

"Why would we allow a business lobbying organization that has a very narrow agenda charge the public to enter a building that the public paid for and frame it in such an aggressive way?" said Hardesty in her statement. "Do you think Black Lives Matter could hold a fundraiser here if they said they would use the money to teach young people their rights when they encounter the police? No, it would not be sanctioned."

The statement goes on to criticize Reese's past leadership as Police Chief and detail Hardesty's attempts over the past month to communicate her objections to the event to city leaders.

In printouts of a March 17 email from Policy Director for Public Safety Deanna Wesson-Mitchell to Hardesty, provided by Hardesty at the protest, Wesson-Mitchell says that funds raised at Meet the Heat will go toward expanding the Community Academy program from an annual to a more frequent event in which more members of the public could participate and learn about police

training. Wesson-Mitchell defended the purpose of the fundraiser, but admitted "the messaging in the advertising was poor."

Despite the Meet the Heat organizers' statements, the protesters gathered outside of the fundraiser were unconvinced of the Bureau's good intentions.

"I think Portland Police is trying to glorify violence," said Kathryn Kendall, one of a handful of members in attendance from the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Portland. "In a time where black lives matter and the police department is not honoring that, I think it's very important for people who are nonviolent to stand up."

Marlana Milne, holding a sign in memory of Fred Bryant, father of Keaton Otis, an African American man killed by Portland Police officers in 2010, also expressed disappointment with the event, specifically citing the use of language such as "high speed chase" in its marketing. "This is a training center, and we should be training people to mediate and de-escalate."

Several protesters at the event held signs memorializing victims of the Portland Police Bureau's past incidents of force and calling for greater police accountability.

After the fundraiser's scheduled 9 a.m. start time, Hardesty read her statement aloud outside the training facility entrance, saying she would have supported the event had it been open to members of the public and focused on how officers had been "retrained to de-escalate situations" and "value all human life." Afterward, she invited

the protesters to follow her into the lobby of the Portland Police Training Facility to ask if they would be allowed entrance to the event. All were immediately met by PPB Assistant Chief Kevin Modica, who, after a brief private conversation with Hardesty, addressed the protesters defending the

positive intentions of the event and urging the crowd to drive carefully on their ways home, ending by telling them, "I appreciate you."

Meet the Heat and the accompanying protest came just under two months after the Portland Tribune acquired and released a Multnomah County Sheriff's

- JO ANN HARDESTY
PORTLAND NAACP

Office internal audit that found officers at county jails disproportionately used force against black inmates. Additionally, the Portland Police Bureau is currently in the second year of a five-year settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice, who found that the bureau routinely used excessive force against people perceived to have a mental illness.

In response to the protest and Hardesty's public statement, PPB spokesman Sgt. Pete Simpson told Street Roots via email, "The Police Bureau's Training Division was honored to host the event on behalf of the Portland Police Foundation to bring business leaders, community leaders, and young people to have a quick look into the world of police training. We are aware that not everyone in this community is supportive of our efforts but we will continue to work to build strong, lasting relationships with everyone in our community."

LEAD, from page 4

In 2011 we won the National Healthy Homes Hero Award, presented by the EPA, HUD, USDA, US Dept. of Energy and the CDC.

And then in 2014 we won the best overall outreach campaign from the same consortium of agencies at the National Healthy Home Conference and that was really interesting to me.

We were up against hospitals, public agencies: really well-funded organizations and our budget that year was like \$60,000.

S.Z.: You've touched on this a bit, but class isn't really an accurate measuring stick to determine the likelihood of lead poisoning.

T.R.: It's a myth perpetuated by the lead industry that this is a low-income, minority problem. The lead industry started doing that in the 1910-20s. As long as they could perpetuate that myth - that it was a low-income problem - then the politicians didn't really think it was their problem and didn't have to really take action. That has been forwarded into our culture and society now 100 years later. So that we don't realize that it is a myth.

Even now, with Flint. They are focusing on this being a low-income problem.

It's not a minority problem. It's not a low-income problem. It's a lead problem.

There is only one place to lay blame in

this, and it's the lead industry.

They knew about the toxicity of the product prior to releasing leaded gasoline and at the beginning of releasing leaded paint because they had workers dying.

S.Z.: Are there actually 80 million homes in the U.S. that contain lead paint?

T.R.: Recent assessments found that 92.5 percent of the homes in the 97202 area zip code for one example, were pre-1978 and potentially had lead paint hazards.

We say 80 million homes. The feds say it's 26 million because they are like, well statistically, the odds are that (some of these houses do not have lead-based paint hazards).

Statistics don't matter in an incidental case of lead exposure.

The other thing is that the feds are (recognizing) lead paint as paint that has at least 5,000 parts per million (ppm) lead in it. But the 1978 law (that banned lead paint use) considered lead paint with 600 ppm lead and the new law says paint can't have more than 90 ppm lead, so even though the feds are looking at paint that is 5,000 and above, we know that lead is toxic to children as low as 90 ppm. Why aren't they including all of the lower lead paint?

These test kits test as low as 600 ppm and the EPA is trying to have them thrown out as "too accurate" because they test below the 5,000 ppm.

S.Z.: Wait, what?

T.R.: The EPA actually hired a company to try to design an instant lead test that is less accurate. They want one that only tests down to 5,000 ppm.

We had the hearing last June. They said they were trying to design a product that was less sensitive because the current product is "too sensitive." How can it be too sensitive? It detects lead. Lead is hazardous at any amount.

You just need to change your HUD standard from 5,000 ppm to 600 ppm. The problem with that is that would make all of these others housing units eligible for intervention and they don't have the funds to address it.

The fact that they don't have funds to address shouldn't determine what they consider a hazard in public statements.

S.Z.: The future seems so gloomy. What can we do?

T.R.: Start with your house. Then deal with your kids' school. Then deal with the playground and the places they hang out and Grandma's house. And then address the bigger community. Make sure your house is lead safe.

Get all the lead out of your house if you can. That includes your plumbing, that includes your soil, your painted surfaces. If everyone made sure that their house was safe, that would go a long way. Kids spend most of their time either at home or in school.

Right now, there is no federal law requiring schools to not have lead hazards.

S.Z.: You studied mask and clown work with the Theatre du Soleil in Paris, and also studied with the legendary circus arts master, Hovey Burgess. That is a pretty interesting nugget of experience. How did this training prepare you for the future and the work you are doing now, if at all?

T.R.: I'm actually a very shy, introverted person, but in order to compensate for that, I pretend I'm an extrovert. I think that is what a lot of actors do. That's why they are good actors. They go out on a limb where they might not otherwise be comfortable.

I always did stage work with the intention of making people laugh and be happy. And the one thing that has made me unique in terms of being an environmental activist, is that a lot of the other environmental activist, is that I am always positive.

Some of the others are very angry, and in all of their presentations they express their anger. I'm (mad) as heck, but I'm not going to speak it in that way. I recognize that there is a problem, but what can we do about it? Let's not dwell on the past, on the angry.

You can't change history. Let's stop dwelling and try to find solutions that are long term, comprehensive and societal.

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