

NAACP prepares for Convention

by Gregory Guder

Less than one month from now, the 69th Annual NAACP National Convention will be held in Portland: the culmination of literally months of planning and coordination by the Portland Branch and the National Office of the nation's oldest civil rights organization.

Some 8,000 persons are expected to converge on the City of Roses, and the eyes of the nation will focus on a most prestigious gathering of notables dedicated to human and civil rights. Not since the Portland Trailblazers ascension to the pinnacle of the National Basketball Association has the spotlight been so bright. Indeed, some of the more illustrious visitors to the convention will bring their own.

The Portland Branch of the NAACP, established in 1914, has never been host-city for the convention, so the responsibility for planning and preparing for such an undertaking has been a challenging one.

Some sixteen committees of volunteers, totaling some 300 persons, have been buzzing about since January (some even before then) and will probably continue throughout the duration.

In addition, NAACP National and Regional officers have used Oregon's borders like revolving doors: Mildred Roxborough, Assistant Director in charge of Conventions, has bounced back and forth from the agency's New York headquarters to Portland like a ping-pong ball with her staff and technical expertise; National Exhibits Director, Geri Johnson and Western Regional Director, Virna Canson, have traversed the state's southern border nearly as much as last year's crop of northwest-bound California immigrants.

Numerous pre-convention activities have set the stage for the July 3rd-7th grand finale: Judge Charles Johnson of Seattle, spoke before the Portland City Club in March to kick things off; Roxborough and company addressed the Blue Ribbon Committee shortly thereafter; at the April 16th Awards Banquet honoring local dignitaries and contributors to the Branch, Virna Canson presented the Youth Council with its charter and introduced the gathering to AACTSO, the Afro Academic Cultural Technological and Scientific Olympics - the new brainchild of Executive Director, Benjamin Hooks to encourage and promote youth in academics and the arts.

In May, James Brown, National Youth Director, followed Ms. Canson's introduction with guidelines encouraging the already-active Youth Council to promote participation in the competition.

True to the old adage, "when it rains it pours," the NAACP Northwest Area Conference, originally to be hosted by the

Corvallis Branch, was re-directed to Portland for May 19th-21st, marking another first.

It goes without saying - organizing 300 volunteers to work as a multi-faceted unit is no easy chore, but the Local Branch, as commended by Ms. Roxborough, has fared well.

To mention a few, convention committees are charged with a multitude and variety of tasks: a Souvenir Journal is being prepared to provide information to conferees about Oregon. The Souvenir Journal Committee sponsored a contest for young artists to design the cover which was won by Randy McKinley.

The Kit Committee is compiling materials - schedules, maps, etc., for use by delegates; one committee is making arrangements for the use of some private homes for housing delegates; still other volunteer groups are gathering financial (Blue Ribbon Committee) and organiza-



Planning Staff Coordinator O.B. Hill and Charles White.

tional (Local Organizations Committee) support, a 300-voice choir and new members for the organization's rolls.

The Entertainment Committee, organizer of the Awards Banquet, will be in high gear throughout the convention as will the Car Contest Committee, or at least the one lucky delegate who will win a 1978 Oldsmobile.

All pre-convention activities will be recorded in print, film and artifact by the Documentation Committee.

It would require a calculator to accurately account for all the speeches made, awards given, dinners and lunches eaten, Alka Seltzer taken, phone calls made, letters written, committees met, donations sought and Tri-X bought.

And, this is just the warm-up.



UP-AND-COMING: Virna Canson, West Coast Regional Director [far right] and Portland Branch President, Reverend John Jackson, present Youth Council charter to Council President, Brenda Knapper and Council Advisor, Ora Nunley. Formed less than a year earlier, the Council membership blossomed to 300 youth.

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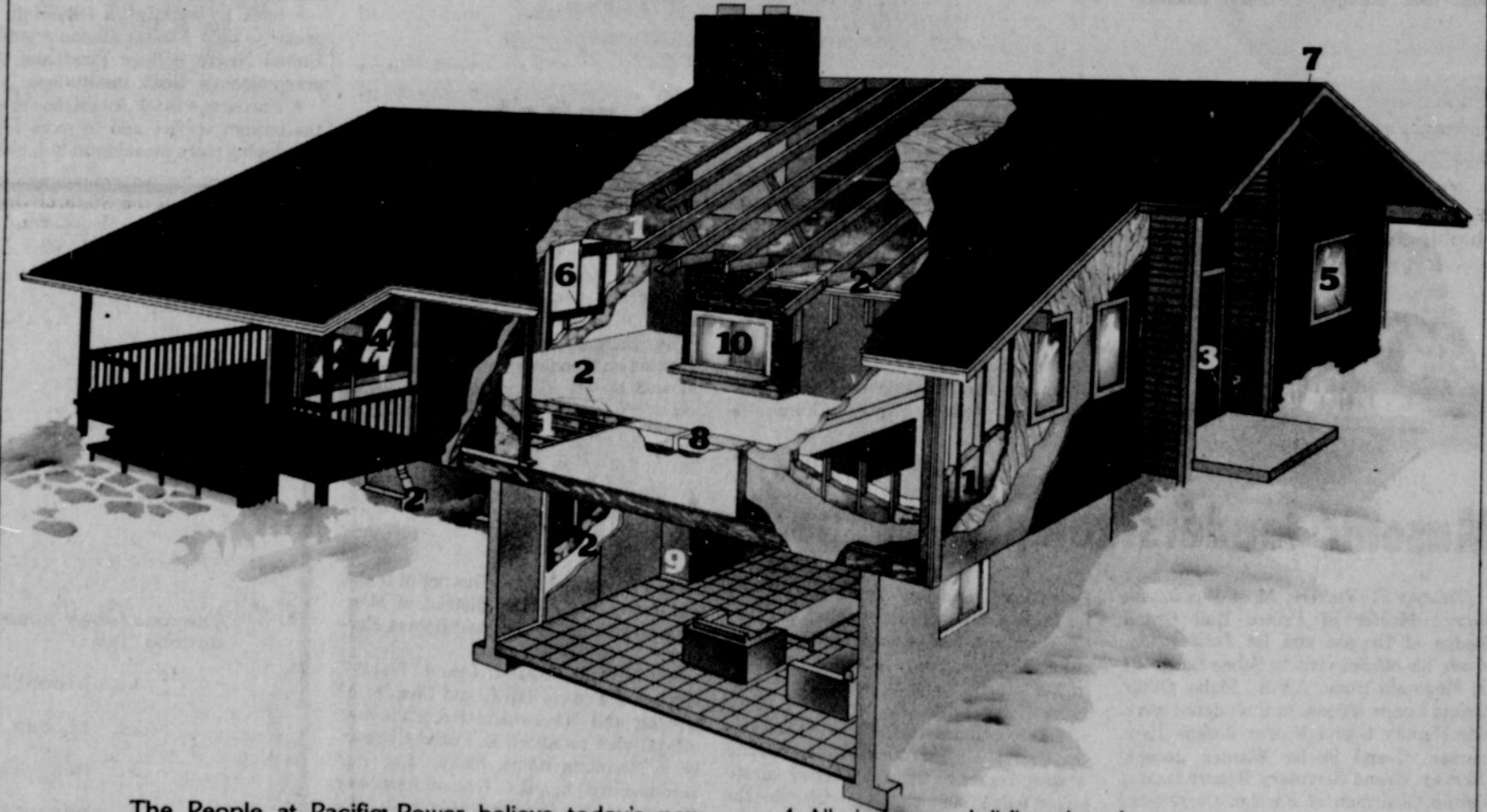
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ONE-OF-THREE: Berna Plummer exhibits one of three human rights awards garnered by her family at NAACP Awards Banquet.

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