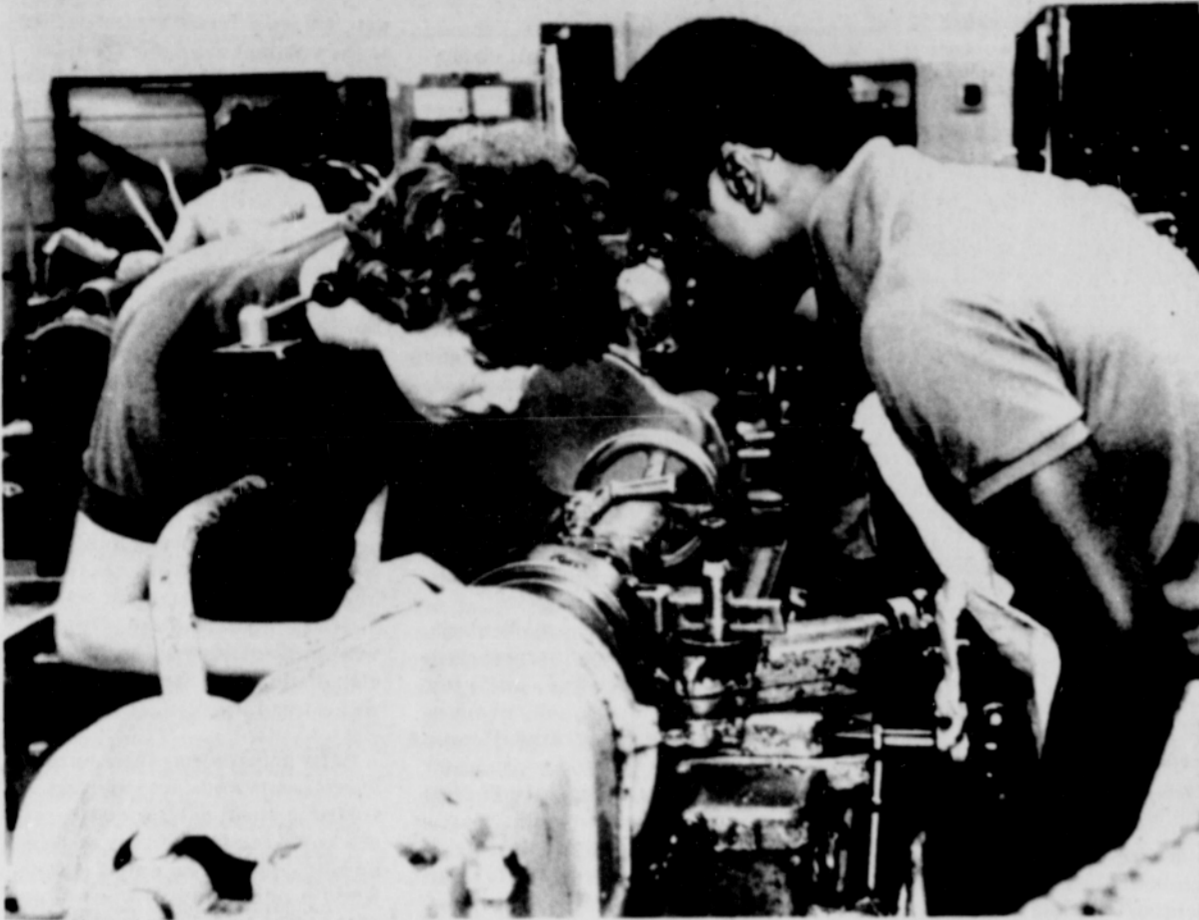


METROPOLITAN



Rich Jeli and Elias Campbell demonstrate machine work at Benson Polytechnical School's "Tech Show." The show provides the community an opportunity to see demonstrations of students' work in a variety of vocational areas. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

Contractors oppose MSD process

by James Hill

Over the principled abstention of District 11 councilor Marge Kafoury, amidst protests from several black businessmen in the audience, the Metropolitan Service District (MSD) awarded what is reputed to be the largest contract granted a minority owned concern in Oregon on February 24.

The Alaska Tundra Exhibit, to become a part of the Washington Park Zoo, was awarded to a joint venture formed February 9, to Roberto Roles & Associates and RP&I General Contractors on a low bid of \$1,482,352. Several options available to Metro could reduce the bid by two-thirds the awarded amount.

Several spokesmen and officials from the National Business League, Oregon Chapter (NBLOC), and black-owned businesses, questioned the procedural process, the lack of consistent MSD minority business enterprise (MBE) policy in contract letting and a seeming lack of integrity demonstrated by the winning general contractors on the largest contract to be let during this fiscal year.

The code of ethics governing contractors appeared to be violated in this contract. The usual case, articulated by O.B. Hill, Vice President NBL, is that general contractors "generally make their intentions to bid on a contract known to all interested subcontractors and suppliers." They make the process known so that, according to Mr. Hill, "the lowest competitive bid possible is submitted to the contractor in order to maximize profit

and minimize loss."

Two MSD councilors raised concern about the MBE program and although members Jack Deines and Bruce Etlinger presented logical arguments about staff conduct they joined the majority in voting to award the contract to the joint venture.

"I think there is something wrong with Metro's contracting procedures," added Etlinger, after alluding to possible bribes or other staff misconduct. He held MSD blameless.

Councilor Cindy Banzer did not feel that council members were duty-bound to comment on and/or to question policies proposed by the staff, and Jack Deines' comments suggested that there was too much ambivalence and too many options available to contractors.

\$52,447 separated the successful joint venture and the second lowest apparent bidder O.T.K.M. Construction, Inc. The total minority and female participation is approximately 58 percent based on information from Metro at press time as Alexander Landscaping is reportedly in line to receive a subcontract for \$75,000. The Alexander contract was not a part of the documents submitted to Metro during the competitive bidding period. Alexander and RP&I spokespersons were not available to answer for comment by telephone calls made to their offices. It would appear that Alexander Landscaping will receive some funds from the contract on a negotiated basis.

Gary D. Hansen, councilor of District 12, whose district includes

about half of the black community, received notice from Charles Crews, President of NBL, about his voting conduct on the matter. In a March 1, 1983 letter, Mr. Crews writes, "Although clear evidence was presented before you concerning the inconsistencies in Metro's MBE policies which caused mass confusion among contractors, you still voted to award the contract. The most devastating blow to black contractors was your insensitivity to the needs of your constituents who live and operate in your district." Crews later added, "One thing Chicago taught us is that persons not sensitive to black needs... will feel the sting of that action at the ballot box."

The apparent winning contractors were simply represented by Donald Matsuda, Small Business Administration (SBA) minority business advocate, who substantiated that joint venture participants met all qualification as 8(a) contractors.

Henry Pelfrey, President, Dirt and Aggregate Interchange, Inc., emoted words to the effect that he was "colorblind" on the award letting matter. Pelfrey was a member of a bid review panel established February 3 by a motion sponsored by councilor Kafoury. A black walkout occurred during the February 11th bid review panel meeting after a black businessman was rebuked by McCay Rich of the Zoo and Sue Kobertz, Metro contract officer who decides the meeting direction panel's course of action.

Other testimony by black people before the board included a charge that "Metro has joined forces with the Associated General Contractors who represent to black entrepreneurs today in the economic marketplace what the Klu Klux Klan has always stood for—which has resulted in numerous lynchings, castrations, and other forms of genocide against black people. AGC has a national policy with respect to Minority Business Enterprise programs to destroy and destabilize black contractors and suppliers."

James Berry, NBL Executive Secretary, contacted by telephone, added, "MBE contractors were deceived by METRO and RP&I. The joint venture was not on the revised list supplied by Alaska Tundra Exhibit architects, "so no one knew they were bidding."

Metro's MBE program appears to be founded on the premise that, "We (Metro) provide the rules and the problems; black entrepreneurs follow the rules and end up as the problem while not benefiting economically," adds NBL President Charles Crews, summing up his organization's position on the Alaska Tundra Exhibit.

Metro has plans on the drawing board for an African Tundra Exhibit, according to a reliable source who desires to remain anonymous. He adds, "We (blacks) need to come into the bid process as the low bidder as 'greasy as possible' and slide into some of Metro's money."



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