

# METROPOLITAN

Controversy continues:

## New MHRC Chairman picked

by Robert Lothian

Even though its budget has been cut by two-thirds and its staff by over half, the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission can still play a positive role, according to the commission's new chairman, Beaverton attorney Vincent Deguc.

"We have a tremendous momentum," said Deguc, 33, who has served on MHRC since 1976 and who describes himself as one of the "old guard" on the commission.

"I think there was a considerable breakdown in communication," said Deguc, referring to the cuts. "We feel that for one reason or another, she (commissioner Margaret Strachan) received a lot of misinformation. We're trying to resolve that now. I'm optimistic that things can be worked out."

In the 1983 budget, the city commission cut MHRC funds from \$300,000 to \$100,000 and staff from 11 to 4. MHRC's neighborhood mediation program was transferred to the Office of Neighborhood Associations, and the fair housing program into the city's housing office.

Deguc said responsibility for the "massacre" of MHRC cannot be laid entirely at Strachan's feet. "It didn't take one vote to create the current MHRC problem, it took three... it's the city's commitment to civil rights," he said.

"We go back and look at the budget process. There was no discussion in terms of policy as to why the fair housing and neighborhood mediation programs were divested."

Deguc described the mediation service as "an excellent program, a program that we created, that had phenomenal success. That was a direct service function the commission had. It was MHRC's baby. All of a sudden, zap-bango, guess what, folks, this thing you have nurtured all along is no longer yours."

For the fair housing program, the scenario was similar, he said.

Deguc questions whether neighborhood mediation and fair housing will be able to maintain quality programs "in house." "We see some watering down there. We have at least a question as to whether they will be able to maintain the level of sensitivity," he said.

MHRC is sponsored jointly by the city and county, with seven members from Portland, seven from Multnomah County, and one at-large member. Task forces cover equal justice, employment, housing and handicapped issues. MHRC's staff does research on local civil rights issues, including police-community relations.

The commission has been recognized as an independent body because of its sensitive role in civil rights issues, according to Deguc. MHRC is too strong, even with its reduced capacity, for independence to be an issue, he said. "The commission is not willing, even in its discussions with Margaret Strachan, to discuss its independence. In order to be effective, it must maintain its independence in making policy decisions. It's not going to be anybody's political football," he said.

"Where we are losing it," said Deguc, "is in our ability to initiate new programs. We have lost a lot of capacity to address new issues." The area of "comparable worth," or equal pay for equal work for men, women, minorities and non-minorities was something that MHRC had wanted to look into, but which will now be neglected, he said. In spite of obvious need, "that's a research issue we simply can't get into," said Deguc.

Strachan recommended the cuts to make MHRC more efficient. "The MHRC hasn't been as active, effective and visible as I'd like them to be in the community," she said.

But according to Fred Milton, chairman of the Committee for Restoration of MHRC, the cuts and transfers "effectively gutted" the city's civil rights program and were "an insult to our intelligence and an insult to the community," he said.

Critics charged Strachan with staging a power play to take control of MHRC away from staff members with whom she had conflicts, and that she was trading votes with Mayor Ivancie. (MHRC reportedly was unpopular with the Mayor for its support of Ballot Measure 51, which asked for creation of a citizen's auditing commission to review police-community disputes.)

The Committee for Restoration of MHRC, an ad hoc coalition of 30 community groups, agreed unanimously at its July 20th meeting to

press for a full city council hearing to air their grievances publicly and demand the restoration of MHRC to its original budget, staff and programs. The committee can be reached at 248-1816.

Deguc, a third-generation Pole, is one of the few Polish- and Russian-speaking attorneys in the area. He is often called upon to defend Russian farmworkers in Clackamas County. From 1975-77, he served as a VISTA attorney with the Urban Indian Council.

As far as his personal motivation for civil rights work is concerned, "I would like to have our community and our world be a better place to live in for my kids than it was for me," he said.



Children playing with fire were the probable cause of this one-alarm fire at 5254 N. Williams last week. Damage to the home was estimated to be \$45,000. One firefighter was injured in the blaze.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

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Fred Miller, director of YMCA Extension Program.

## YWCA expands to North/Northeast

A new commitment to North/Inner Northeast Portland is being made by the YMCA of Columbia-Willamette following a strategic planning effort in those communities.

Fred Miller, 33, has been named Director of the YMCA Extension Program for the North/Inner Northeast area. Miller has been with the YMCA in Portland for three years, and prior to that was a program director for the Berkeley, California YMCA.

"Currently, we're developing a statement of the long-term role of the YMCA in that area," Miller said. "By long-term, I mean five, ten or fifteen years."

Miller explained that he is at work now putting together a steering committee of citizens from North/Inner Northeast, and that it will be that group which decides what kind of programs will best serve the people in those communities. Key volunteers at this time are Zeph McNaughton, chairman of the North

steering committee, and Roy Pittman and Katie Bretsch, who are involved with the Inner Northeast committee.

"The programs we decide to offer we want to be meaningful and constructive, and follow the YMCA Mission Statement," Miller said. The "mission" of the YMCA of Columbia-Willamette, Miller explained, is "to significantly improve and positively influence the conditions which affect the quality of life for our members, our families and our community."

"Our presence in the North/Inner Northeast area will not be a token presence," Miller emphasized. "We will give meaningful service to the people in the community. We want the people there to think of the YMCA as their YMCA."

"The community has been very receptive," Miller added, noting that existing agencies have also been helpful in the YMCA's efforts. "People have been warm and cordial."



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