

'I thought that I could do it better doing it my way'

We the willing led by the unknowing are doing the impossible for the ungrateful. We have done so much for so long with so little, we are not qualified to do anything with nothing.

by Lanita Duke

Grassroot News, N.W.—When you walk into Complete Gardening Services that poem is the first thing you read. The second item you notice is the wit, humor and candor of the proprietor, John M. Craig.

Craig started his gardening service because he felt limited while working for someone else. "I felt that I could do it better doing it my way."

Since 1970, Craig has operated with the mother-wit and wisdom of the ages. He does not bite his tongue when it comes to talking about doing business in Oregon. "The attitude of non-minorities in Oregon says to us that we are nothing. They do this by elimination, suppression, avoiding and ignoring you. They act like they do not want to let you (blacks) into the mainstream of the economy."

He calls the grants, loans, and assistance acts very misleading. "By the time those programs get to Oregon they are so milked down to where it is too time-consuming to understand. And by the time you understand it the benefits are just about over. If private industry really wanted to help black businesses we wouldn't need the government in-

volvement. As far as the Surface Transportation Assistance Act goes, there is no guideline regarding how to implement the law. The State can twist it and play games with it all they want."

Craig wants the black contractor to be accepted on his own merits. "Accept us on equal terms without shopping out bids and they should

pass the Unions; they don't have to pay that big wage anymore."

Craig says he believes the youth of the '80s could take advantage of this type of market to learn something. "If you can take advantage of this market you can get ahead. If you can save your pride you can sneak in and ask the foreman to pay you \$7 an hour to teach you how to

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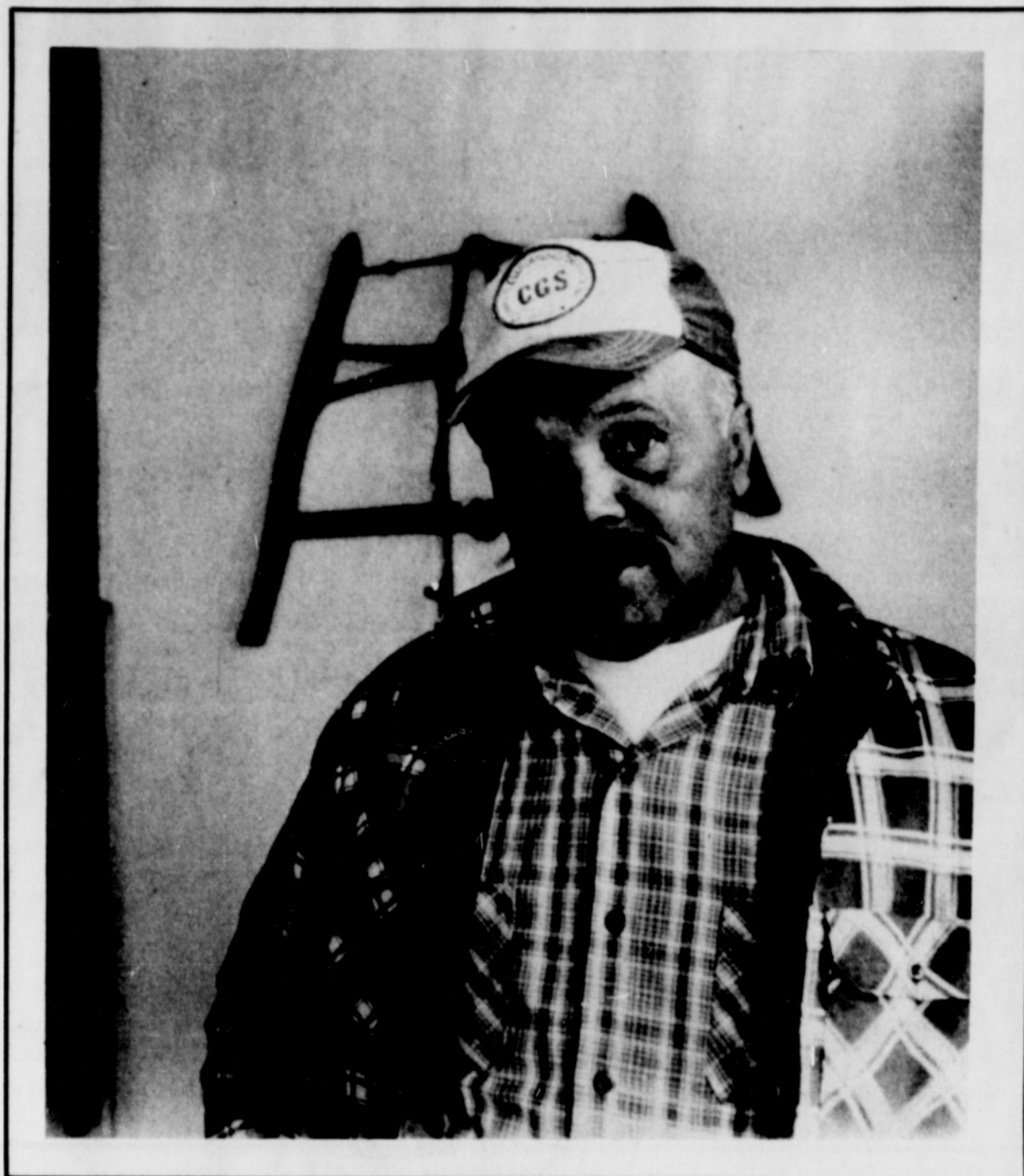
take into consideration that minority businessmen and women will not get the same type of discounts as the non-minority. If we are running competitive bids the minority bid will be four or five percent higher than the non-minority." He states this sorry fact of life is due to years of discrimination, overt and covert, which puts the black businessperson years behind in the system.

How does he evaluate today's marketplace? "It is about the best you can get to. We are hungry. We are back to the 1930s. We have to get off our backs. Now they can by-

hang sheet-rock. They are paying that other dude \$14 an hour. The youth of today needs to realize that you have got to pay to learn. They need to get some fat on their heads. You go with a guy for half the price and he will make you learn because he is going to make you work."

The competition among MBEs who are contractors is silly, he states. "There is a lack of real craftsmen in the business." The competition is generated because MBEs concentrate their efforts in Portland, Oregon. "We don't seek Salem, Sandy or Coos Bay."

John Craig sees a trend developing in the construction industry that is away from doing the day-to-day work. "The American man is becoming an administrator. He is not going to physically do the work. He is going to be in a necktie and a three-piece suit. Our company is going to work with our hands and we will make money because of it. A service type of operation is the kind of business that will make money tomorrow."



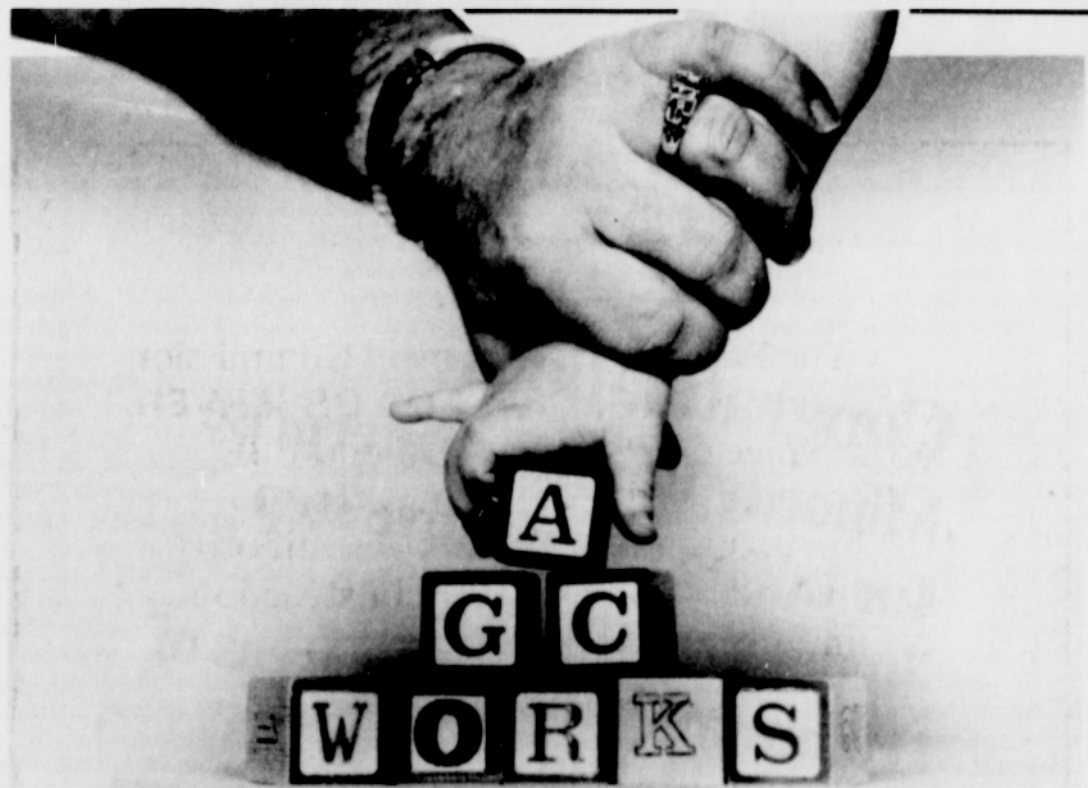
John Craig started Complete Gardening Service because he felt limited working for someone else.

Craig sees future openings in America for those who can work with their hands.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)



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