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Principal Denies Racial Tensions At Whitaker

by Jerry Garner

"Whitaker doesn't have a racial problem like other schools in the district. We have our share of fights. During some of these altercations, students

may use racist remarks. Such incidents are infrequent at Whitaker." The above statement was made by Don Starr, principal of Whitaker Mid-

dle School in Northeast Portland. Starr made these comments to the Observer in regard to recent news stories reporting that racial tensions were running high at Whitaker.

Starr discounted the rumors about the Feb. 5th incident at the school involving a white Whitaker student and two Blacks. In the incident, the Whitaker student was beaten by the Black youths aboard a Tri-Met bus. Commenting on the incident, Starr said, "Some Whitaker students who witnessed the altercation on the bus told me that our student started the incident after he used racial slurs in conversing with the other youths. The two Black youths were not from Whitaker."

Starr feels that the situation at Whitaker has been blown out of proportion by the news media and some groups in the community. "The fact is that some of our kids do get involved in fights, but all of the other non-students are causing problems. In fact, they're coming here to be spectators and just causing the group to be larger than what it needs to be," Starr said.

As an example of outside instigations at Whitaker, Starr recalls that on the date of the Tri-Met episode, Portland School Police cleared away many non-Whitaker students from the campus, including one 19-year-old. He said the reason so many outsiders come to his school is due to the time Whitaker dismisses its students, and its location. "We are the only middle school in the city that dismisses our pupils at 3:30. In addition, our location [42nd and Killingsworth] is a transfer point for many students from other schools. Some of these students, while waiting for their bus, venture on to our campus and some start trouble."

Starr was asked if there was any truth to the rumors reported by some news media that Whitaker students were carrying weapons. He replied, "That rumor is untrue. Our students don't carry weapons in the school. This rumor started after the Tri-Met thing. The school police confiscated some knives, clubs, and two plastic toy guns, and nunchunks from some kids. However, the youths were not from Whitaker." Starr said any time students bring toy guns into the school, and they're seen by teachers, they're confiscated and disposed of.

Starr said he can assure Whitaker's parents that their children are safe during school hours. "We provide a secure atmosphere for the student in an effort to educate them. Whitaker is the only middle school in the city accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges."



Don Starr, Principal at Whitaker Middle School.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

Phillips Applauds Courts Decisions

by Jerry Garner

The recent U.S. Supreme Court's decision upholding the rights of judges to order employers to temporarily use strict racial quotas in promotions as well as hiring to counter past discrimination against Blacks was praised by Robert E. Phillips, Multnomah County Affirmative Action Officer. "The ruling by the Court reaffirms its support for the concept of affirmative action, and that remedial measures are justified to correct past discrimination and imbalances in the work forces."

Although the high court reaffirmed its support for affirmative action, the vote was only 5-4. Phillips was asked to comment about the possibility that in the future the Court could reverse itself in its support for affirmative action. He replied, "There is chance that President Reagan may have the opportunity to appoint some new members to the Court before his term expires. However, if this occurs, I don't think the revamped Senate Judiciary Committee would confirm any appointees who are too far to the right or who are insensitive to civil rights."

The Court ruling was based on an Alabama case that was brought before the Court by the state protesting the decision of a federal district judge's orders requiring Alabama to promote one qualified African American trooper for each white state trooper because of Alabama's history of discriminating against Black state troopers in hiring and promotions.

Although Phillips said the Supreme Court's decision was a victory for African Americans and other minorities, he feels a recent ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco will have a far greater impact on minorities in the workplace. In that case, the 9th Circuit Court ruled that minority workers who were handicapped by subjective hiring standards did not have to prove intentional discrimination. "The Court's decision is important because it says that subjective or objective testing can be considered discriminatory if it has a 'disparied impact' on minorities based on the result of the test," Phillips said.

He said neither court rulings will have an impact on Multnomah County because the county is in compliance with federal guidelines for affirmative action and equal employment opportunities.

The rulings, however, will put additional pressure on the city of Portland. The city has been criticized recently for the low numbers of minorities and women employees. The city is under federal orders to come up with an



Robert E. Phillips, Multnomah County Affirmative Action Officer.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

affirmative action plan. The city had a plan in the early 70s but repealed it. According to John Woods, the city's personnel director, the city should

have an affirmative action plan that meets federal guidelines by late summer.

Bob Koch: Too New to Rate?

Calling on the leadership of Northeast Portland to unite in its advocacy role for economic and social development in the area, newly-elected City Commission Bob Koch attempted to downplay the controversy surrounding the Beech Street Project by stating, "Once the confusion dies down, roles will become much clearer which will enable us to get on with this project and others which are planned for N.E. Portland."

In the February 23rd interview, Commissioner Koch also challenged small businesses to continue to play a positive role in the area's future. "Our greatest success will come from small businesses across Northeast Portland," he stated. "Those businesses and community leadership, divided or not, Black or white, are needed if we are going to uplift this community."

"Northeast Portland is not receiving its fair share of Housing and Community Development funds," Koch stated. "We need to create new opportunities and apply for the maximum dollars available. This city is ripe for an economic infusion which could occur within two or three years. Subsequently, organizations, groups and neighborhoods need to start planning now." The Commissioner said he has asked the Portland Development Commission to review its budget to determine if there are any funds available that could be shifted to N.E. Portland.

Asked if he would be willing to play a role in helping to resolve the Sabin Neighborhood conflict, Koch responded that he was already involved to

some extent and would be willing to expand his involvement if asked.

Citing a lack of resources as one of the primary reasons for the conflict, the Commissioner reflected back on previous years, recalling the dollars available with the former Portland Metropolitan Steering Committee (PMSC). "As a former board member, I can recall the board sitting down

trying to find programs to spend the money on. Now a days, we are trying to determine which programs are going to be reduced or defunded simply because the money is not there. A divided community cannot compete for federal dollars."

Blaming his recent pension plan fight and disputes with Mayor Bud Clark as contributing factors to the recent low performance rating given City Hall leadership by pollsters, Commissioner Koch indicated that after two months on the job, he now has the opportunity to concentrate on his role as Public Utilities Commissioner. "Negative public reaction to those problems are understandable. The public has a right to expect better performances from elected officials." Koch described his relationship with the Mayor as "cooperative and improving."

The Commissioner pointed out several projects pertaining to water and sewage disposal scheduled to get underway in N.E. Portland. Contracts will be awarded and will involve minority participation, he announced.



BOB KOCH - "Northeast Portland is not receiving its fair share of Housing and Community Development funds."

Photo by Richard J. Brown