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Black United Front Seeks Volunteers For Saturday School

"If We Don't Save Our Children, No One Else Will"

by Avel Gordly

Motivated by its longstanding commitment to the education of Portland's African American children, the Portland Chapter, Black United Front (BUF) will begin a Saturday School program in January 1988. The plan was announced by BUF Co-Chair Ron Herndon at a press conference on Wednesday, October 14 at the Kind Neighborhood Facility. The announcement came a day following KPTV's (Ch 12) continuing series of reports on the failure of Portland Public School programs to raise Black student achievement scores substantially.

The Saturday School, according to Herndon, will provide reading and math instruction, Black history and culture, and other subjects. Eight NE area churches have agreed to serve as Saturday School sites. The churches are members of the Albina Ministerial Alliance (AMA).

Joyce Harris, Director and a founder of the Black Educational Center, with assistance from Elaine Harrison, an AMA Headstart teacher, has developed a curriculum for the program for grades K-8. The curriculum will be used by volunteer teachers who are currently being recruited.

Harris, who, along with Harrison, also a member of the Front's Education Committee, stressed that the Saturday School concept was developed partially out of a recognition that some public school teachers do not have high expectations of their Black students. Harris said volunteers will be carefully selected and trained and that "the training is designed to provide people who have a commitment to Black children with the necessary skills to teach. Volunteers do not need to be certified teachers," she said, adding that, "the experience of many alternative schools has been that people without certification can be trained to have success with students."

Cultural identity and academic success are key components of the BUF program. Harris said the Saturday School "will provide students with a strong sense of their heritage. It will be a consistent approach to developing positive images and identity in the children. Knowledge of the students' history and culture will provide students with the self-confidence they need to achieve academically. The tutoring part of the program will reinforce in the student that they have the ability to succeed in all areas."

Karen Powell, another member of the BUF Education Committee and Director of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) Education Program agreed with Harris. She said, "The Saturday School will provide basic skills and enrichment and detailed knowledge of Black history and culture for the children who enroll in the 2-hour, Saturday-morning sessions." Both Harris and Powell expressed excitement at the potential of the Saturday School program to reach many students, particularly if the community strongly supports the effort.

The Black United Front has scheduled a community meeting of individuals and Black community organizations for Thursday, November 5th, at 7 p.m. in the King Neighborhood Facility, to discuss its plan. Volunteer teachers, funds, classroom materials and additional church sites are needed.

Persons wishing to volunteer as teachers or who want to provide the other needed resources may call Karen Powell at the American Friends Service Committee Education Program at 230-9427.

If we don't help and save our children, no one else will!



Ron Herndon.

PHoto by Richard J. Brown

Why We Can't Wait

They know what we all should know: To wait ten, twenty or thirty years is to invite social, cultural, economic and political disaster; high unemployment, high crime rate, drugs, and other tragedies we can only imagine. If African-American students, because of low achievement levels, can't qualify for admission into colleges and universities, they certainly won't qualify for the existing jobs that only require a quality high school education. Those jobs will go to students who have the better skills. Because of the nature of this crisis, and, because of the dilemma it has created, a distressing message has been sent to members of the business community: "For the next thirty years, based on academic qualifications, most African-American students who graduate from Portland Public School will be below par." In other words, they will be a poor business risk.

The Black United Front's proposed Saturday School should be what the doctor ordered. Here, African-American students will find an enriching world of masters: masters of culture, masters of math and science, masters of African-American history of culture, masters of art and music, masters of academic education. The Black community is capable of effectively participating in the proper education of its children, and it shouldn't hesitate to do so. Not to do so would be our "crime of the 20th century."

African-American students would benefit greatly from the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of African-American masters like Mr. James DePriest, the Honorable Judge Deiz, Mr. Nate Jones, Master Drummer Bruce Smith, Master Dancer Ruby Burns, Master Historian and Inventor Professor McKinley Burt, Master Historian and Inventor Kamau Anderson, the Honorable Senator Jim Hill, and the list goes on and on and on: Ms. Avel Gordly, Ms. Katherine Bogle, Ms. Virginia Phillips, Pastor Grace Osborne, Commissioner Dick Bogle, the Honorable Margaret Carter, Mr. Ron Steen, Ms. Janice Scroggins, Mr. Michael Grant, Mr. Marvin Johnson, the Urban League, the NAACP, the Links, the Jack & Jill Club, the National Council of Negro Women, Ms. Ruby Reuben, Ms. Rosemary Allen, Ms. Joyce Harris, Mama Nana, Mr. Bernie Foster, Mr. Al Williams, Ms. Sue Busby, Mr. Richard Brown, Mr. Ken Berry, The Louisiana Club, The Texas Club, Rose City Connection, M.A.R.I., The Arkansas Club, The Black Educators of Oregon . . . We could be here for days and still not name all of the masters available to participate in resolving this most serious crisis.

Because of heritage, both the Black community and Dr. Matthew Prophet understand the position they are in. More importantly, Dr. Prophet, when all has been said and done, will do what he feels must be done. Dr. Prophet isn't a heretic and the community commends his accomplishments so far. He has performed his job well. However, he himself has admitted that the school system he inherited has some serious defects; it needs some serious repair, because, as African-American Poet Amiri Baraka reminds us, "Somebody's slow is another body's fast . . ."

The African-American community has given Portland Public Schools a challenge that is bent on dispelling the notion of poor parental involvement. It now waits to see if the Portland Public School System has the courage to dispel its growing reputation of indifference toward their children.

Negatively or positively, the Portland Public School System will answer that question. It has to. Our children's future depends on it. In the meantime, the Black community will strengthen its resolve to give its children the best education possible.

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EDAC Meeting Notice

The Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) for the City of Portland will meet on Tuesday, October 27, 1987, at 4:00 p.m. at the First Interstate Bank Tower, 1300 SW Fifth Ave., 21st Floor, Mt. Hood Room.

The Committee will be discussing a process for updating the City's economic development policy.

Portland Can Run

As many as a thousand runners will compete in the 1987 Portland Can Run benefiting The Salvation Army canned food program on Sunday, Oct. 25, 1987 at 8:30 a.m.

The event will feature 8k and 3k runs and a 3-mile walk, all starting at the Montgomery Park at N.W. 27th & Wilson streets.

People can register at all Portland-area G.I. Joe's box offices, Nike Downtown, Northwest Fitness, and Athletic Department in Beaverton Mall. The entry fee is \$3.00 and two cans of food.

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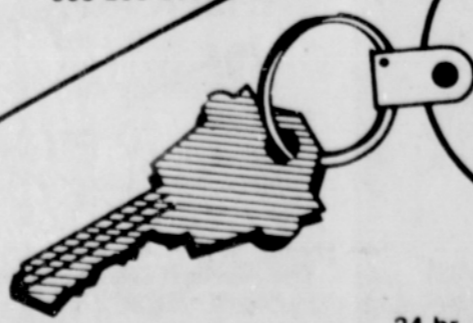
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All High School Students (and Parents) are invited to a Conference on "Black Colleges: The Legacy Continues"

When: October 18, 1987

Where: Columbia River Community College, 1000 NE Oregon Street, Portland, OR 97232

Time: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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"Black Colleges: The Legacy Continues"

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