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"The Eyes and Ears of the Community"

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PIIAC: Progress Report

by Nyewusi Askari

Back in the early 1980s when allegations of police officer misconduct were running rampant, the City of Portland appointed a Citizens Task Force On Internal Affairs. Its purpose was to conduct a six-month study and make recommendations on how the Police Internal Investigation process might be improved and how the public's confidence could be restored or enhanced.

On July 16, 1982, the Task Force submitted a final report to the Mayor and Police Chief. The report listed eight major conclusions and made 20 specific recommendations for improvement. One specific recommendation called for the establishment of an on-going Citizens' Committee to verify the fairness of the Internal Investigations process.

In November, 1982, City Council voted to create such a committee comprised of three members of the Council, city staff personnel and citizen volunteers. They were charged with the responsibility, authorized by Section 2-109 of the Charter of the City of Portland, to investigate the Internal Investigations System, utilized by the Bureau of Police for resolving allegations of police officer misconduct, by reviewing the overall process and by hearing certain appeals, filed by either the complaining citizen or the accused officer in such cases.



Students at Harriet Tubman Middle School were shown the Japanese art of paper folding, Origami by an 84-year-old Marie Furukawa. Furukawa, a retired teacher who lives and worked in Japan, is visiting friends and classmates in this country from her college days in the United States. (L-R) LaToya Hampton, 6 gr.; Le Cherya King, 6 gr.; Furukawa; Nailah Okonkwo, 7 gr.; and Angela Kaiser, 6 gr.
Photo by Richard J. Brown

On November 20, 1987, Commissioner Earl Blumenauer sent a memorandum to Commissioners Lindberg and Bogle stating that "PIIAC (Police Internal Investigation Auditing Committee) is a source of frustration to the citizen volunteers, the appellant, the police, and the Council Committee members." Blumenauer's memorandum noted that "The Citizens Committee has asked Council for direction and guidance, thus opening the door for some concerted thought and a fresh look at the committee and its role." In the memorandum, Blumenauer made four specific recommendations which included reorganization and/or elimination of the committee.

Of concern to the committee is Blumenauer's proposed, "Back to the Basics" approach. As Blumenauer sees it, "under the current ordinance, PIIAC has little power to grant meaningful relief to individual complainants and that it cannot reverse or impose discipline on police officers, (thus) to the extent it takes it (PIIAC) should take only those that help it perform its auditing function."

In response, PIIAC has drafted a letter to Mayor Clark and City Commissioners requesting a meeting to discuss any proposed policy changes.

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PIIAC member, Jean Vessup, proposes public hearings to allow citizens the opportunity to find out what the Committee is about.
Photo by Richard J. Brown

PIIAC Update

Responding to efforts by the Police Internal Investigation Auditing Committee to strengthen its investigating and monitoring standards, improve its image and regain citizen respectability, Jean Vessup, Vice-Chair (PIIAC), has proposed a three-point plan that is gaining support from the African-American community.

Ms. Vessup's plan calls for setting up public hearings, soliciting public opinion via questionnaire, and evaluation of questionnaire responses and testimony to determine public sentiment and support for the future direction of PIIAC.

At PIIAC's February 4th meeting, Vessup stressed the importance of

citizen input. "We are talking about a Committee that was voted into existence by the voters. The voters have never really had a chance to even address the issue of the Committee."

Vessup said media's focus on PIIAC has generated public interest and curiosity. "We have not taken the opportunity to go out there and talk to the public about the Committee. We have not talked about what it's done or what it stands for," she reminded Committee members.

Avel Gordly, representing the Black United Front, said the BUF "believes the community has a right to know how the Police Bureau, funded with their tax dollars, is functioning in specific areas. And,

therefore, we appreciate the efforts of this body to keep tabs on how the police handle citizens' complaints."

Addressing the issue of public opinion, Avel said the BUF believes PIIAC has an obligation to "help the community understand how it has functioned in the past, and what its present functions are." She said one way to do that is through a series of public hearings.

In a letter addressed to Commissioners Blumenauer (Chairperson, PIIAC), Lindberg and Bogle, the Black Leadership Conference voiced its support for PIIAC.

"We believe it is necessary to reiterate the importance of PIIAC and emphasize the vitality of having a group of independent citizens oversee the Police Bureau's handling of citizens' complaints of police misconduct.

"We would like to be involved in any future discussions regarding the Police Audit Committee. It would probably be a good idea to hold a public hearing so other citizens can express their opinions," the letter concluded.

Ms. Vessup has proposed that public hearings be held in North-east (March 8), Northwest (March 22), Southeast (April 5), Southwest (April 19), and North Portland (May 9).

After some brief discussion, the Committee voiced its support for the proposal and said it would work closely with Ms. Vessup on implementation of the plan.

Survey Reveals Losers in Price War: The Consumer

by Ian MacCrae

A 20-pound box of laundry detergent costs \$9.49 at Fred Meyer. The same item costs \$12.99 at Safeway and Albertson's, and \$14.69 at Kienow's and Corno Foods. An apple which costs 15 cents at Corno Foods costs 48 cents at Albertson's. A loaf of white bread may cost 33 cents at Corno Foods, but 85 cents at Fred Meyer. Meanwhile, several grocery chains claim to have lowest overall prices, and cite "independent surveys" to back up these claims. For the consumer, the result of all this is confusion, and, according to the Oregon Public Interest Research Group, that confusion may be costing Oregon consumers millions of dollars every year.

On February 2, OSPIRG released the results of a survey which its spokespeople claim could help to clarify which stores are offering the lowest prices. After surveying prices of most commonly purchased items at major supermarket chains in the Portland area, OSPIRG found that overall prices differ greatly as they do for the various categories of grocery items. Project Coordinator Julie Hering called the results "startling in that an equivalent market basket cost \$77.64 at Fred Meyer and \$101.21 at Thriftway, a difference of over 23 dollars. . . . For a family that spends this much every two weeks, this savings would amount to over \$600.00 per year."

While noting the quality, selection, location and service are also important factors in deciding where to shop, OSPIRG consumer advocate Jon Stubenvoll called prices the "bottom line" in being a smart shopper. Here are some of the survey's conclusions as to which stores offer the lowest prices in various categories.

Fred Meyer has the best prices for meat, dairy, grocery edibles and non-edibles. The chain was second lowest in prices for frozen foods. Corno Foods was the winner in the produce category, followed by Waremart and Thriftway. Corno Foods came in last in several other



Jon Stubenvoll (L) and Julie Hering (R) respond to questions about OSPIRG's survey of grocery prices.
Photo by Richard J. Brown

categories, however, including dairy, grocery non-edibles and grocery edibles; with Thriftway coming in last place in frozen foods.

Fred Meyer was the least expensive in terms of overall prices, followed by Waremart and Albertson's. Highest overall prices were found at Thriftway, followed by Corno Foods and Safeway. Kienow's chain prices are in the middle of the price range for local chain stores.

Stubenvoll said that message of the survey is that consumers should be "a little skeptical when they hear advertising claims by grocery chains claiming to be overall price leaders." He also said OSPIRG would conduct other surveys in the future to aid consumers who want to shop around for the lowest prices.

In related news, this reporter has found evidence that overcharging customers may frequently be occurring as a result of the electronic pricing system now used by all major grocery chains. Reports of overcharging suggest that a combination of several factors makes it increasingly widespread and difficult for consumers to detect. Among those factors: electronic pricing means that prices are no longer stamped on the items them-

selves; it is up to the buyer to remember what price was listed on the shelf. Thus, if the computer at the check-out stand contains an incorrect price, the customer may be overcharged.

Adding to the problem is the fact that many stores list prices in a manner which customers regard as confusing. The unit price by volume or weight may be listed without the price of the item itself, or may be difficult to read and understand.

Finally, the speed with which items are run through the check-stand makes it virtually impossible for the customer to keep up with the sum on the register. This combination of factors makes double-checking a time-consuming and complex task even for experienced and careful shoppers, much less those whose mathematical skills are poor or who suffer from impaired vision.

Bob Jenks, OSPIRG Campus Coordinator at Portland State University, said that numerous complaints of overcharging had been received by the consumer interest organization since the release of the price survey. He said that OSPIRG is now deciding whether to systematically investigate electronic pricing with a view toward urging a return to individual pricing of items.

Overall Grocery Prices — Comparison by Store and Item

Ranking Order: Least Expensive to Most Expensive

grocery items	Albertson's	Corno Foods	Fred Meyer	Kienow's	Safeway	Thriftway	Waremart
Grocery Edibles 13 Items	2 \$19.06	7 \$23.74	1 \$18.81	3 \$20.51	5 \$20.96	6 \$22.87	4 \$20.70
Grocery Non-edibles 7 Items	4 21.82	7 24.33	1 16.72	5 23.62	3 21.52	6 24.08	2 21.10
Dairy 7 Items	3 13.67	7 16.51	1 12.50	4 14.97	5 15.41	6 16.38	2 12.61
Frozen Foods 5 Items	4 9.85	5 10.25	2 9.53	6 10.51	3 9.69	7 11.35	1 9.19
Produce 8 Items	6 6.00	1 03.45	5 05.67	4 05.49	7 06.32	3 05.09	2 04.81
Meat 5 Items	3 07.31	5 07.85	1 06.94	4 07.45	7 08.94	6 08.23	2 07.27
TOTALS 45 Items	3 \$77.71	5 \$86.13	1 \$70.17	4 \$82.55	7 \$82.84	6 \$88.00	2 \$75.68

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Only items available at every store were included in these totals. Stores which carry "house brands" may decrease these total figures — "store brands" were not included in the totals above if any store did not have a store brand for the item on the grocery list.