

The Portland Observer Salutes Women of Color During National Women's Month

Velma Maria Spears — 21 years old — is a young, talented and innovative woman; not of the future, but of today.

She is employed with the Bonneville Power Administration in the Information Systems Department as a Computer Clerk GS-335-4. She works a full day and then goes to another job as an EHP Medical Bill Payer with the CIGNA Insurance Companies.

Ms. Spears graduated from the ITT Technical Institute with an Associates of Science degree in Electronic Engineering Technology. She attended ITT units in both Portland and Nashville, Tennessee. She was on the Dean's Honor Roll at both locations with a 3.8 and 3.6 G.P.A., respectively.

In her spare time, she is a Petite Model, and she is an actress. She has been seen on the television in several of the "Golden Graham Cereal" commercials. She is represented by the M.A.R.I. talent agency. She also appeared in "Faces International Magazine".

A graduate of Benson Polytechnic High School, the only girl among 3 very tall brothers, and one of the "Pioneer Women of Benson, Ms. Spears is very outspoken and has a very strong character.

Her plans are to get a Master's degree in Electronic Engineering and to do some High-Fashion modeling on the East coast.



Velma Maria Spears

"The women of this world . . . must exercise leadership, quality, dedication, concern and commitment, which is not going to be shattered by those who would view our cause as one that is violative of the American dream of equal rights for everyone."

Barbara Jordan
Former U.S. Congresswoman



Mrs. Etoile Hicks

by Mattie Ann Callier-Spears

Mrs. Etoile Hicks Cox came to Portland in 1941 from Kansas City, Kansas. When she arrived there weren't very many Blacks in Portland.

She graduated from the original Black Beauty School in New York — Madame C.J. Walker's School of Beauty. When she arrived, she found out that here in Portland they did not allow Black girls to attend beauty school. She opened Charlene's Beauty Box at 1409 N. Williams. It was right across the street from the Fraternal hall.

The shop occupied the same building as Bogle's Barber Shop (Dick Bogle's grandfather), and Dr. Joyner, M.D.

Later on, she added a clothing shop called, "Tot and Teens". She remained in the beautiful



neighborhood in the Northwest. She caused a stir when she joined the Catholic Daughters of America #1488, where she was the only Black to ever be given membership. She was one of the founders, and later became the proofreader, of the Northwest Clarion Newspaper.

She had her membership in several organizations: Daughters of the Elks #202, Beauticians Sorority (Vivian Barnett was 1st Basilius), OACW (Oregon Association of Colored Women), President of the Multnomah Women's Club, and the Ladies of St. Peter Claver.

She has been married to Mr. Arthur A. Cox, Sr. for 65 years. They have 3 children: Ruth L. Lancaster, Arthur A. Cox, Jr. and Charlene L. Wright, all of Portland, Mr. and Mrs. Cox are great-great-grandparents.

building for 9 years. Then, everything moved to 2700 N. Williams (just up the street). Mrs. Cox was one of our pio-

KAREN BELL, CIVIL ENGINEER

HIGHWAY DESIGNER

"I did this!" said Karen Bell, speaking to high school students about the Oregon City Bike Path—her first project as a Highway Engineer with the Oregon Department of Transportation.

There was a tone of pride in Karen's voice. "I'm a people person," said Karen, "but there is a real sense of contribution in seeing something you design get constructed. My work benefits others."

Other projects that Karen has worked on include the Clackamas Park Bridge Replacement and the Terwilliger Blvd. overcross.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY

Karen continues to work with students, teachers and parents to develop math and science skills.

She is a regular contributor to the Portland Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement Program (MESA)—speaking to groups, leading site visits, and encouraging youth to develop a broad range of skills.

She has taken a leadership role in putting together the Expanding Your Horizons Conference, a program designed to increase awareness and understanding of math and science careers—targeted at middle school students, particularly young women.

She is a "teacher" in Family Math—a short term program designed to teach math skills to both students and parents. The program is open to students of all ages, elementary through high school.

Karen will also be teaching at Saturday School, sponsored by the Black United Front. Karen has attended all five training sessions for the Saturday School staff.

MOTIVATED BY QUALITY

Karen's first job after graduating from Portland State University was as a temporary Highway Engineer with ODOT.

Bob Schalk, her immediate supervisor stated, "I wanted someone with the self-confidence to learn on the job and who was motivated by the quality of their work."

That description fits Karen. "She's aggressively interested in learning, she is a good 'student' on the job, and she is diligent," said Schalk.

AN OPPORTUNITY

Karen, a graduate of Oregon State University, credits high school career exploration programs and her summer engineering trainee jobs with the Army Corps of Engineers and CH2M Hill, as being instrumental in her career.

She also credits Curt Duval, Design Engineer for ODOT's metropolitan region, for her first professional job. "Curt provided a first chance for many minority engineers in the Northwest," stated Karen.

"All I wanted was chance," said Karen, "I knew I could create my own opportunities once I got in the door."



The Oregon Department of Transportation

CIVIL RIGHTS SECTION
412 Transportation Building
Salem, Oregon 97310
378-8077

