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Mysterious Fires Strike Jefferson High School

BY OBSERVER STAFF

A busy arsonist has added to the woes of a local innercity high school right at the start of a critical school year. In the past week, firefighters, police and school authorities have been kept busy fighting and investigating six deliberate incendiary events. The volatile circumstances have been traumatic for pupils, teachers and parents alike.

While the Portland School District has announced a "Secret Plan" to apprehend the perpetrators, our interviews with some of those vitally concerned do not reflect a great deal of confidence in the process. What does impress all concerned, including our staff, is the coming together of a community that is frustrated, angry and frightened. This heartening response has been emphasized on televised news reports, in the print media, and is supported by our personal queries of students and teachers. We all have been reassured by the appearance of scores of parents and community activists who are monitoring the situation in the hallways and on the campus at large; they are to be commended.

The situation is little different from that when an international terrorist can singlehandedly place an entire airport or other public facility under siege. The authorities report that there are no "solid leads," though they have invoked a "combination of standard investigative and surveillance practices." This underlines the value and necessity of the community support cited above. But, we cannot afford to ignore the consequences of the disruptive ordeal to which the educational process at Jefferson is being subjected.



Jefferson High School

Photo by Veronica Green

While school opens as usual this week, students will not be allowed in the building before first period (except for the special 7:25 A.M. courses). This leads to several unfortunate circumstances; first, we have a rather disoriented congregation of students outdoors and exposed to the vagaries of the weather—and the interaction with drop-out-youths. Also, that first hour is often used to complete home work that should have been done the night before, and just generally, get oneself together for a round with the establishment. (You do remember, don't you?)

The attitude of Jefferson's principal, Alcena Boozer, has been very posi-

tive. She has praised both students, parents, fire officials and police for work, commitment and "common sense." These recent events have no doubt been an immense strain upon

the cited support of this community.

It is not indicated how long the travail and attrition of the educational process will last at Jefferson

High School. It is our further hope that we are not facing an extended series of "copy cat" crimes and that the real and critical business of the institution can be gotten on with. It occurs, too, that this community support that has coalesced around the school can translate into an upscaled participation of parents in the regularly scheduled school activities that require their around-the-year support and commitment. We wish Jefferson the best—there may be another side to this coin.

“We cannot afford to ignore the consequences of the disruptive ordeal to which the educational process at Jefferson is being subjected.”

her, for all of this must have necessarily distracted her from the primary mission of educating young people effectively when the entire process is already under traumatic pressures of finance, ambiguous directives and objectives, and deserved or undeserved criticisms from every angle. It is our hope that she will continue to receive

David Little to Run For City Council

Citizens to elect David Little would like to announce that on September 16, 1991 he filed to run for position 4 (Dick Bogle's seat) on the Portland City Council. Little believes in citizen solutions and he is willing to work with you, the citizens of the city, in finding those solutions and putting them to work. An employment specialist for the State Employment Division, Little said his top priority will be involving citizens in city government. "No longer can we wait for someone to save us. It's no city hall, the police department, the fire department or 911 that's going to save our city; it's us, you and me, ordinary citizens working together for a better Portland." Citizens interested in identifying key issues in their community and developing solutions are encouraged to host a Citizen Solution Session by calling (503) 252-3292.



David Little

David Little moved to Portland in 1984 after graduating from Oregon State University in Education. He has begun graduate work in pursuit of a masters in public administration degree at Lewis & Clark College. Currently, Little serves as an elected official, vice chairman of the Multnomah

Education Service District; and appointed by the mayor to serve as a Commissioner for the Housing Authority of Portland. Little recently celebrated his tenth wedding anniversary with his wife, Gloria Henderson-Little and three children; Bryan (5 yrs old), Diana (3yrs old), and Mychal (2 yrs old).

Ora Hart Fire Fundraising

BY MATTIE ANN CALLIER-SPEARS

On September twelfth, a fire was set ablaze in Ora Hart's home by her six year old grandson. The blaze destroyed her entire bedroom, all of her clothing, shoes and many important documents.

They, Ora and her husband, discovered that their fire insurance had expired. So -- the damages to the family dwelling would go undone. Much sadness set-in.

The Miriam Missionary Circle, of the Mount Olivet Baptist Church, has taken it upon themselves to host an "ALL YOU CAN EAT SPAGHETTI DINNER" to assist in the raising of

funds for Ora Hart's family. The major item will be to get a roof back on the house before bad weather sets in.

The community is asked to take part in this great fundraising event by coming to the dinner on Oct. 12, 1991 from 5-8 pm at 116 NE Schuyler Street, Mt. Olivet Church. Donations of \$5 for adults and \$2.50 for children are requested. All persons who are unable to come, for whatever the reason but would like to give, may send your donation to:

Mount Olivet Baptist Church
c/o ORA HART FUND
116 NE Schuyler Street
Portland, OR 97212

Former Gang Member's Decision: Front Page or Sports Page

by Bill Barber

“How do I get my name in the paper?” A young person asked the newsman. “You either do something good or you do something bad. It is your decision,” was his simplistically profound reply.

Pierre Enyinwa was running like an express train headed out of control toward the front page. Then one day he decided to visit with some friends and shoot some hoop at the House of Umoja.

Enyinwa at 6'4" and 202 lbs. is a good-sized young man for 16 years old. His family moved from Nigeria to the United States when he was just a baby. It is doubtful he had any idea of the dramatic events that would unfold in his life when he moved to Portland in 1981.

He got caught up in the gangs in his freshman and sophomore years of high school. One day he sat back to look at how his life was going. He decided it was not on the path he wanted to take.

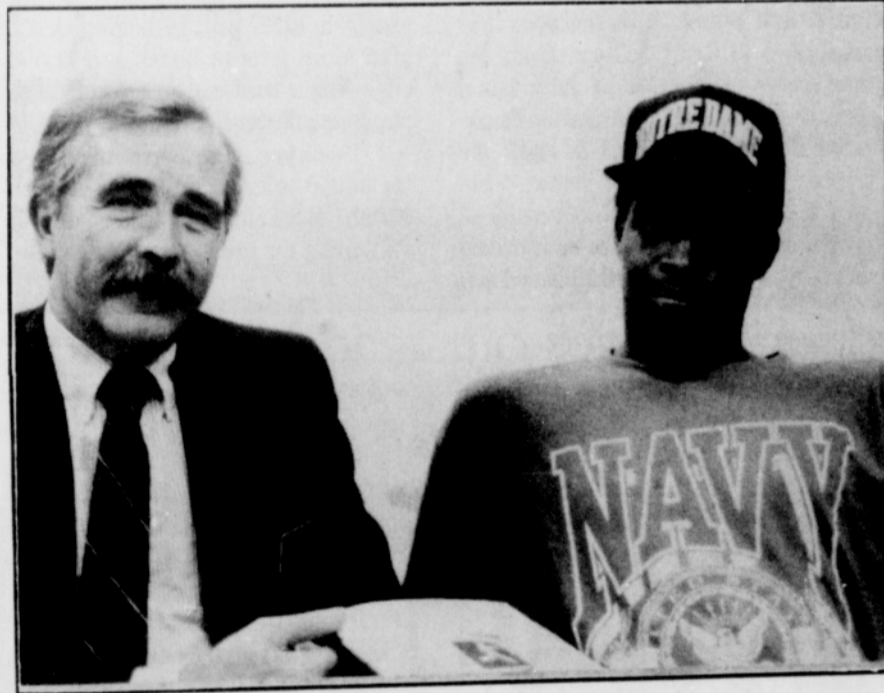
“I didn't really see myself excelling as being a gang member. I didn't know anybody who really could,” he said. As a freshman at Wilson, Enyinwa developed a bad reputation. The self-proclaimed gang member was skipping classes and all but ruined his academic status. Wilson principal, Gene Valjean, remembers Enyinwa as “a very intelligent boy with great potential, who didn't have much success at Wilson.”

Enyinwa freely admits his priorities centered around establishing the gang's prominence; “Taking no mess from nobody...we were about money...money and weapons. What I saw in the gangs at the time” he continued, “was status. It was a respect thing... maybe the wrong kind of respect. I got caught up in it. It was a 'do or die' type of situation.” “Do or Die” -- The front page of the daily newspaper confirms that sentiment all too often!

“I came down here (House of Umoja) one day to see how it ran. It was a nice facility. The people here seemed like

they cared. I spent the night here. It seemed like...man if I could really change my life... what would I do? One of the workers here said “Your pretty good at hoop and I know the coach at Grant High School. Why don't you let me hook you up?” I said, “Yeah. I couldn't really play last year because I had the image of being a gang member.” The basketball coach talked to the football coach. When Pierre decided to play football he didn't get a free ride to become part of the team. He explains, “I had to take back-up classes and make up work during the summer along with weight training and daily doubles. I figured it takes hard work to get where you want to be, especially if you're as far back as I was.”

Speaking of his new change in attitude after switching high schools, Enyinwa says “At Grant, the group I started hanging with was the smarter bunch... the group that wanted to get things done. It's hard to see the big picture when your in high school,” he added.



Bill Barber, left, talks with House of Umoja resident Pierre Enyinwa, right, who excels off and on the basketball court

Pierre sees college in his future. Right now computer course work would be his choice. He has increased his efforts in the classroom. This comes from the same kid who for years looked at grades as something he would concentrate on “next year.” “But now I'm a Junior,” he emphasizes “I realize I don't have

many more 'next year's!' ”

When this reporter asked “How did you get out of the gang?” Pierre responded, “I was lucky. My older home boys told me gang banging is not always the only way out. They figured I was good at hoop so I should go to school and play hoop. They don't stand

in your way if they see you're true about what you really wanted to do... unless you got home boys that really don't understand or care about you.” As far as anyone having anything negative to say about his leaving the gang scene and joining the House of Umoja, Pierre offers, “House of Umoja has an image of people who go to jail, and get put in here as a consequence. It bugs me that people outside don't understand a person is trying to change his life by coming here and looking for a better way. I don't get down on anybody for not having the heart, or decency or the understanding to see what I'm trying to do. People that talk bad about me aren't the people I center my life around.”

Pierre has noticed that people respond differently to him now. “Yeah, some of the people I hang out with now at school were friends, but we could never hang out because I had no interest in what they were doing. The people I used to hang out with aren't doing the same thing I'm into now.”

Teachers are responding to Pierre's more positive attitude as well. “They aren't pushing the 'silent type' thing anymore. It's like everybody is trying to help me out.” Project Scholarship has recently taken an interest in Pi-

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“Nintendo To The Rescue”
by McKinley Burt



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perspectives

Minority Business Issue

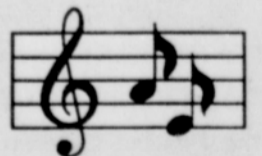
Governor Barbara Roberts' Proclamation



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Part I

“Norman Sylvester: A Northwest Blues Original”
by Bill Barber



ENTERTAINMENT

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