

Some more light on light rail

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

We should cast some needed illumination on more of the buildings and spaces between these steel ribbons. The present situation reflects the sage advice of Louis Jordan's classic blues chant, "You don't learn that in school."

However, it would seem [that] the people of Oregon had a lesson plan prepared for that overconfident coalition of politicians, bureaucrats, real estate investors and contractors who were driving the 'Measure 32' Light Rail vehicle... down a road which many taxpayers felt would lead to further fiscal trauma in this state. Or so they voted, "El voto castigo" (the voters punish).

One reader derisively alludes to "too much traffic on Oregon's 'Yellow Brick Road' to economic disaster." This perceptive allusion is to that mythological highway featured in *The Wizard of Oz*. Few are aware that this all-time favorite children's classic began life as a turn-of-the-century political parody designed to ridicule the presidential campaign of William McKinley. An imaginative satirist cast candidate McKinley as the "Tin Woodsman" and his "Gold Standard" theme as that "Yellow Brick Road."

However, the light rail quandary would seem to defy any such light-hearted mythification though I do admit to a disingenuous tongue-in-cheek quip at the close of last week's article. "I had a great thought, why

not let the auto and oil companies pay to replace the Light Rail they took away?" The problem with such a populist approach is one that attaches to most solutions currently advanced for Oregon's cash-strapped economy: how can a tax burden be shifted to the business community, when it simply will be passed on to the consumer in higher prices for goods, service and rents. Is a Sales Tax still unthinkable?

This brings us to Measure 47 which, according to many voters, was seen to be (among other things) an opportunity to further guarantee that the "Light Rail assault on fiscal responsibility" would be prevented from "coming in a window". When I titled my series of articles, "the Death and Resurrection of Light Rail," I hardly anticipated that the "Second Coming" would be delayed by so many misgivings. Clearly, if the Phoenix is to arise from the ashes, there must be a better organized structure to this and any other ventures in economic development by the State of Oregon.

After all, it seems like only yesterday that I received a most amazing letter from the Oregon State Department of Economic Development in its second year of existence. My request for information on its formal structure and how a citizen went about submitting an application for a particular project brought the following communication: A photostatic copy of a single page torn from the *Oregon*

Blue Book. It rather succinctly defined the departments mission--that's it!

Not being entirely helpless, I promptly left my office in the Urban Studies building on the PSU campus and headed for the S.W. Alder St., Rians Eating Establishment where the in-crowd of accountants, lawyers and prime movers hung out. It took only two hits on my credit card at the bar to determine the who, what, how and where of economic development in the State of Oregon; A process for which a downtown law firm had quoted a \$150 charge.

The tremendous response to this "Light Rail" series already surpasses that of the furor created by my Hawaii-African Dynasties' revelations. Copies have been mailed, faxed and distributed all over the state--and farther; by individuals, industry and city, county and state agencies, etc. The personal calls and inquiries I've fielded are mostly a standard inquiry "How in the world did you sit over there on Alberta Street and accumulate all that documentation--you must have a hell of a network?" I have good research techniques and former students, Portland to Japan.

Acknowledging the requests of general readers and the teachers who are tailoring lesson plans around Light Rail, next week's article will feature that major African American urban phenomenon and cultural citadel we know as Harlem. There will be critical documentation of the key role of

Light Rail and the black inventors whose patented innovations that made it all possible (including a Portland Connection); The Third Rail, electrical transmission systems, trolleys, signal and safety devices, street lighting systems, etc.

You will be amazed at some of the other players who had key roles on this classic American stage. They range from Thomas A. Edison who made the black electrical engineer, Howard Latimer a member of his famed "Edison Pioneers", Robert Moses, the powerful Czar of urban planning in New York who ate and slept freeways, Lewis Mumford, Olmstead -- and most critically, the AFL Trade Unions. Some of the material used in my lectures and presentations.

In response to the several Washington County groups who expressed interest in starting a "Light Rail Model Club" similar to the clubs of the model railroad hobbyists, here is a key and very valuable source to add to the others I've given. It is "the indispensable reference work for city transport systems, manufacturers and products worldwide...comprehensive profiles of management, operation, financing and development."

Jane's Urban Transport Systems, 1994-1995, originally published at \$275.00, may now be obtained for \$49.95 from "The Scholar's Bookshelf, 110 Melrich Road, Cransbury, N.J. 08512. Item #6DD9B (S&H \$6.50; (609) 395-6933, Fax (605) 395-0755.

Economic empowerment: Doing business with one another

BY JAMES CLINGMAN

We have heard it said many times that black businesses cannot survive on the sole support of other black people; that there must be an additional influx of business from other groups as well, in order for African-American business to make it.

Maybe that's why some black business owners try to distance themselves from black consumers and attempt to hide the fact that they are black.

I have heard some business owners say that "whites will not patronize me if they perceive me as a black-owned business."

Well, that's sad if it is true, since black consumers contribute so disproportionately to the profits of white businesses and those of other ethnic groups. It is also sad that some African-Americans believe that they cannot make it on black businesses alone.

If we take out those businesses that always have and probably always will cater to and be supported by their own group, i.e., mortuaries, barber and beauty shops, dentists

and doctors for the most part, we still have a host of businesses in our communities with which to work.

If you think back to the post Civil War period, Jim Crow, and even the 1950's, you will remember that black businesses flourished, and they did it on the sole support of black consumers. The vast majority of the top 100 black businesses, such as, Johnson Publishing, Soft Sheen Products, were built strictly with black consumer dollars and cents. Look at them now--they're multi-million dollar businesses.

Sure our businesses need and should have white consumer dollars, and anyone else's dollars, in return for quality products or services, but we must never overlook, negate or diminish the value of the black consumer dollar. Believe me, others think quite highly of our spending power.

There are several reasons for the way we think about this subject and for our low propensity to do business with one another. However, the main issues resolve around how we treat one another; how we follow through

(or do not follow through); how we take one another for granted and how we tend to mix business with personal relationships.

These problems run so deeply in many of us that we do not even want to be associated with another black person or business. We refuse to shop at black-owned stores or call on black professionals to do work for us. Likewise, black business owners fall back on the lame excuse that black people alone cannot support their business, and they try to ease closer to the white market.

Simply stated, it's not that black consumers cannot support black businesses--it's that they don't, at least not to the degree they should.

If African Americans simply plowed 25 percent of their disposable income into black-owned businesses, we would see an economic turnaround like none other in history. If black business owners would focus on "taking care of business" instead of taking short-cuts with black consumers, they would gain more of the benefits of our \$400 billion mar-

ket.

Doing business with one another is simple.

Take a look at the Jewish community; look at the Koreans; watch Arabs, the Chinese, the Japanese and the Cubans. They care enough about one another to support their own businesses and to provide quality goods and services.

Sure they have internal problems, but they fix them among themselves, and if they cannot fix them they never allow those problems to override the economic continuity within their communities.

All it takes is a little caring and a little bit of trust. Black people can work together. We can and should continue to build our businesses with the black consumer in mind.

If your product is good, others will buy it. If we deliver the goods, do what we say we are going to do, maintain our integrity, and hold ourselves accountable when we know not to do those things, African-American businesses will grow, they will prosper and they will multiply.

IFCC enters new era

BY DAN BELL

Interstate Fire Cultural Center, located at 5340 N. Interstate is a community based center for the performing, literary and visual arts.

Founded in 1982 with the support of the City of Portland. It is housed in a former 1910 firehouse. The 7,500 square facility houses 110 seat theater, two art galleries, a dance studio and administrative offices.

The IFCC throughout its existence has been a front runner in supporting multicultural diverse artists. Originally under a more conducive funding climate in the early and mid eighties, IFCC produced and supported various unknown and emerging theater artists. With the passage of measure five, the funding climate changed. Now the Cultural Firehouse serves as cross-cultural community venue for outside performing arts groups.

Within the last three years the Cultural Firehouse has received a grant from the Minneapolis based Northwest Area Foundation.

The grant has allowed Cultural Firehouse to hire marketing and development personnel. The hiring of these two positions enabled the Cultural Firehouse to better contribute to its own ongoing sufficiency and maintenance.

Sue Busby, executive director, says that the existence of the center is grounded on the collaboration of funding from a broad and varied base of city, federal, private foundations, and corporations.

IFCC offers eight main programs:

1) Main Theater--a cross-cultural theater season that balances established works with new productions that confront important issues of color and culture or examine universal themes from an ethnic or cultural perspective.

2) Origins Lecture Series--an annual speaker series that presents performing, visual and literary artist from diverse ethnic backgrounds who discuss the process of creating art and address ethnic and racial

issues.

3) Gallery Exhibits--monthly art exhibits featuring the work of artist from diverse ethnic and cultural traditions. National touring exhibits depicting the lives of other cultures and countries are also occasionally scheduled.

4) Neighborhood Youth Theater Project--a summer production camp for inner city youth providing mentors from the professional arts community, offered in collaboration with the Portland Police Bureau and designed to expose "at-risk" young people to options and alternatives.

Young people from Portland's Hispanic, Asian and African-American communities learn together about aspects of theater production while exploring the dynamics of team work.

5) Student Matinee Series--Weekday matinee that introduce young people to the magic of live theater and the diversity of the world's different cultures.

6) New Script Series--A venue for new and emerging playwrights. The series features reading of new scripts, followed by moderated discussion between playwright and audience. Produced in partnership with Portland State University and Lewis and Clark County.

7) Workshops and Classes--Courses in dance, art, theater, writing and more. Classes are taught by independent instructors.

8) Community Rentals--The performance and gallery spaces are available for rental by independent companies, performers and community groups.

In its 15 year existence, the IFCC has served an unique forum for the expression of both performing and visual arts.

As they embark into new era of budget constraints and more dependency on the private sector and self reliance, we can be rest assured they will continue to provide the community with the highest level of multicultural art programming.

Vitality, Vim & Vigor

Most of us could use more energy to get through our busy lives. A new brochure, "Vitality, Vim & Vigor", offers six steps for developing more energy, and it's free from Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. To obtain a copy of the brochure, send a stamped, self-addressed, business-size (#10) envelope to: "Vitality, Vim & Vigor," Office of Public Affairs, Baylor College of medicine, Houston, Texas 77030.

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Prepping and elderly person's house for the Portsmouth Community Redevelopment Corporation is the task championed by the Day of Caring volunteer team from Saks Fifth Avenue.

Career change turns into family affair

After 20 years of working in the banking and finance industry, Ken Rasmussen decided it was time for a change. While between jobs, he worked as house painter in Walla Walla, WA, specializing in the renovation and restoration of homes. What he didn't realize was that this transition would give him the opportunity to pursue the American dream--or that his whole family would be involved in his new career.

Rasmussen read about a company called Certa ProPainters in an entrepreneurial magazine and decided he was ready to get into a bigger market. "We wanted to stay in the Northwest, so when a franchise became available in Portland, OR, we made the move," he explains.

Certa ProPainters is a professional full service residential painting service, with corporate headquarters in Valley Forge, PA. It is the only business of its kind in the United States' \$100 billion painting industries. Realizing that every homeowner requires their work on an average of

every five to six years, Certa ProPainters has added professional management to an industry sorely in need of it.

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