

How do you measure our quality of life?

By Prof. McKinley Burt
We have heard so much about the "Quality of Life" this past decade and at least a dozen ways to measure such an auspicious state of affairs. So as a matter of interest, what can we say about the "hood in this respect?" You know, the near-Northeast neighborhood and North Portland.

If you live within these environs and so many of our readers do, then without doubt you often have been distressed by media accounts of the style and substance of our lives here. Not always, of course, but frequently enough for a pretty strong conviction of bias to emerge.

A neighbor of mine calls it "selective imaging," where urban areas with a black population of any size are "handled" with a standard format of "feature this-ignore that."

Conversations with individuals and groups in the Northeast reveal that except for the case of occasional special assignment reporters, Portland's "print media" is a far cry from the exploitive big-city daily newspapers in much of America.

Most residents of the neighborhoods say that it is television with its "breathless, breaking-news, crisis-oriented, super-competitive evening news wars for viewers that has reduced Northeast and North Portland into metaphors and icons for the deterioration of the 'quality of life.'"

Now, you have to admit that there is something very special about living in an inner-city neighborhood when you finally realize that your junk mail is substantially different from that received by your outlying fellow citizen's, primarily of another culture.

A household visit or a less informal encounter with Euro-culture could reveal an eye-opening vista of the over-priced exotica and erotica to be purchased via the Direct Mail

postal mall. Of course, there is some good, functional stuff as well - but why haven't you known about this shopper paradise? Must you move to Lake Oswego?

Well, let's look at it this way. Marketing studies conducted for the benefit of the "catalog houses" tend to express the same ethnic biases that we described several paragraphs earlier; in America race is inextricably bundled with income and it costs a "bundle" alright to design, print and mail those beautiful multi-color catalogs by the millions.

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Consequently, certain areas never are even remotely considered in market development; they don't think that 'you' have either the money or the culture to appreciate their expensive wares.

And if you are not eliminated from the Direct Mail Mall in that fashion, then consider this. U.S. Government census tract information pretty well, categorizing most of us by income, tastes; habit and habitat. This information is compiled and classified accordingly and no catalog will reach your hot little hands unless you live in the right neighborhood (and, supposedly, have the proper "Quality of Life").

Now, there are some exceptions to this marketing logic. For instance, magazine publishers make their sub-

scriber lists available to the Direct Mail people either by direct purchase or through huge mailing list brokers who deal in classified lists in the thousands or in the millions.

No matter 'where' you live, some subscriptions will get you in this network: National Geographic, Smithsonian, Natural History, Scientific American, Harpers, etc., and of course subscriptions to any of the journals of the professions, science, medicine, education, etc.

But not to worry, I believe we all know that it is quality people who

make a quality neighborhood with their quality way of life; a little redundant perhaps, but you get the meaning. Every week I look through the Portland Observer newspaper to learn of all the beautiful people doing things to enrich our lives and give meaning to our less-than-wealthy existence.

In our neighborhoods we are volunteering without being asked, we are mentoring, teaching, intervening with a threatened youth, caring for our ill, our elderly, our deprived.

Our neighborhood watches and other efforts to secure our security, health and welfare, all speaks to a "Quality of Life" that cannot be extrapolated from the U.S. Census or any marketing surveys. It lies in the reality and goodness of the people.

The search for a new FDA chief

Federal health officials have interviewed scientists including a Seattle geneticist and a New York cardiologist in the quest for a chief of the powerful Food and Drug Administration, and the White House should see the first list of serious contenders in a month.

The Clinton administration is struggling with how to replace fiery former Commissioner David Kessler, who gave the FDA new prominence - and a number of enemies - by cracking down on tobacco and pushing a host of consumer-protection issues.

Top candidates so far appear to be strong public health advocates as well. The Associated Press has learned. Considered high on the list:

Dr. Myron Weisfeldt, a former American Heart Association president who heads Columbia University's medical department. Well-liked by consumer groups for pushing the FDA to require better food labels, he is a scientific adviser to drug giant Merck Inc. and several medical device firms.

Dr. Gilbert Omenn, dean of the University of Washington's School of Public Health, an expert in genetics and environmental health who made headlines with a study declaring popular beta-carotene supplements a waste of money. He served on President Carter's science staff.

Randy Juhl, dean of the University of Pittsburgh's School of Pharmacy who is well-known by medical manufacturers as a former chairman of the FDA's advisory committee on nonprescription drugs.

The three confirm they were interviewed this month by Health and Human Services officials, a first move for HHS Secretary Donna Shalala to narrow the candidate field for the White House.

Also recently interviewed were FDA drug evaluation chief Janet Woodcock and Iowa heart surgeon Dr. Steven Phillips, the candidate favored by Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa.

"In the last few weeks, there seems to have been some significant movement" in selecting candidates, said Ira Loss, an FDA analyst with HSBC

Washington Research. The search is for someone who "will be less confrontational with the Congress, more deferential" than the controversial Kessler, he added.


Still, any decision is months away. Shalala spokesman Victor Zonana would say only that "the process is moving forward," and a commissioner is expected to be in place by fall.

The Senate must approve President Clinton's nominee, and law-

makers have signaled they want someone outside government who will be open to a congressional overhaul of the FDA.

The nation's chief consumer protection agency, the FDA is criticized by some for not approving lifesaving new medical therapies quickly enough.

Weisfeldt said Clinton officials told him Shalala could begin her own interviews to pare down candidates within six weeks.



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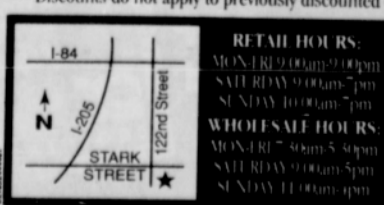
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