

# Infant Mortality Decreases...but African American Babies Still Die at Twice the Rate of White Babies

On December 7, 1998 Reuters story that reported on a study completed by John Hopkins University and the National Center for Health Statistics in Chicago announced the good news about longer life and less infant deaths.

But, Kathryn Hall, Founding Director of Birthing Project, USA based in Sacramento, California, was not celebrating. In a statement in response to the study, Ms. Hall, whose

non-profit organization has saved thousands of babies lives since 1992, clarified the statistics.

"I am concerned by recent media reports regarding America's decreasing infant mortality rates," Ms. Hall said. "The reports are misleading and they give the impression that we have won the battle against poor birth outcomes. While this may be true for some of us, it is not true for specific ethnic groups. The disparity between

whites and African Americans, American Indian/Alaskan Natives, Native Hawaiians and Puerto Ricans is alarming. Specifically, the mortality rate for African American babies remains twice that of Caucasian babies."

The Birthing Project affiliates across the country provide one-on-one support to at-risk pregnant teens and women.

"Birthing Project and other programs that target these at-risk fami-

lies are continuing to educate our communities about the need for prenatal care while we provide the support required to access it. It would be extremely helpful if news organizations would remind the public that even though there's good news in general, the disparity in infant mortality remains and continued awareness of the problem can reduce the numbers greatly," Ms. Hall concluded.

African Pride Products has been the sole corporate sponsor of the Birthing Project since 1995. Brian K. Marks, President of A.P. Products, Ltd, distributors of African Pride, added, "We are quite proud of the fact that since our involvement with the Birthing Project, they have grown by 50%. Because our awareness efforts have helped this growth we are helping to save babies lives all across the country. We are grateful and proud of

our continuing relationship."

The following are current statistics for specific urban areas regarding infant mortality per thousand births of African American babies:

Forth Worth, TX - 10.0; Chicago, IL - 17.2; Memphis, TN - 14.3; Washington, DC - 18.2; Philadelphia, PA - 19.3; Sacramento County, CA - 14.0; Harlem, NYC - 15.2; Marian County, IN - 17.9; Los Angeles County, CA - 16.3; Phoenix, AZ - 15.6.

## School Closures: Jefferson, Tubman And Penninsula Threatened

"The threat of school closures is real," says Geri Washington, youth advocate and candidate for the ESD board. "Those of us in North/Northeast need to organize and fight or we could be losing Jefferson, Tubman and Penninsula."

An audit commissioned by Portland Public Schools recommended the closure of thirteen schools to save the district \$26 million dollars. KPMG Peat Marwick's performance audit called for the closure of one high school, one middle school and eleven grade schools to save \$11 million in maintenance costs and gain \$15 million by renting the space. Bruce Sampson, PPS general counsel, says the cuts are necessary be-

cause the district faces a \$40 million shortfall next year.

Jefferson High School at 57% of capacity, Tubman Middle School at 61%, and Penninsula Elementary at 41% are among those schools with the lowest student enrollment. Some community activists believe the board will move to close these schools because they serve low-income, racial minority and politically weak neighborhoods. "When the ax comes, we know that wealthy neighborhoods will be spared and our schools will be hit," asserted Jamie Partridge of the New Party.

Despite a citizens panel recommendation of no closures, school officials such as superintendent Ben

Canada continue to point to school closures as the single biggest cost saving device available to the district. A final decision will be made by the school board in the spring.

The superintendent and some members of the school board, notably the chair Ron Saxton, favor charter schools. Closing neighborhood schools and directing public money to untried, unregulated charter schools appears to be on the board's agenda. Community critics charge that the audit company (KPMG) was hired through Saxton's influence to further this agenda. "Is it possible to get an 'independent' audit from a firm that doesn't appear to be public education friendly? Is there a con-

flict of interest when a consulting firm audits a public school system and also manages schools for profit?" asks the Citizen Monitoring Advisory Committee (CMAC), which has conducted extensive research on KPMG and the audit.

Campaign Launched to Stop Closures

An alliance of community organizations is launching a Stop Closures campaign. A public forum on Wednesday, January 27th, 7 PM at the King Neighborhood Facility, 4815 NE 7th, will rally members of the Hispanic Parents Association, Black United Front, Coalition of Black Men, Rainbow Coalition, New Party, and Rethinking Schools Teachers to hear

from CMAC, school activists, and members of the Task Force on School Closures, including County Commissioner Diane Linn.

School closure critics charge that closing neighborhood schools causes transportation problems, attendance and parent involvement problems, leading to lower achievement and dropout problems. Closures would seriously disrupt neighborhood relationships and vitality, they say. In North Portland, the closing of Jefferson High School or Tubman Middle School would disperse Black students, revisiting the busing problems of the sixties and seventies. Members of the Task Force on School Closures

say the pain and disruption of closing schools would outweigh the financial savings.

The Citizen task force recommended getting city and county agencies and other users to pay rent to share space in underutilized schools. Schools as community hubs, where adult education, health clinics, recreation programs, and other social services are offered would be good for neighborhoods, say task force members. When parents feel comfortable coming to school for different services, they are more involved in their student's schooling, therefore students perform better.

## Looking To The Future Where Do We Go? And How Do We Get There?

Driving or riding? Pedaling or walking? What are the best choices for the transportation future of our region? Metro's elected officials and local partners from Tri-Met and throughout the region want to hear your suggestions! That's why Metro is hosting a series of listening posts in mid-January.

There are some big issues that the region's leaders must face over the next few months and years:

- \* What should happen in the South/North corridor following the November vote?

- \* What is the best mix of roads and rails? of cars and mass transit?

- \* What are the people of this region willing to pay for?

Many people have already written, e-mailed or called with their

ideas. About 150 people attended the first listening post held in early December. Of those who spoke, many said that the region could not build its way out of congestion. Rather, they urged the elected officials and planners to explore a variety of options that include more streetcars, busways, competitive bus options, commuter rail, better bike and pedestrian facilities, and continued development of light rail as well as new or improved roads.

"We want to get people involved so that we get all the ideas on the table," said Metro Councilor Ed Washington (District 5). "That way we can compare and maybe combine the most innovative and most cost-effective plans." As chair of the Joint Policy

Advisory Committee on Transportation, Councilor Washington called for the listening posts and has asked dozens of local officials to join him at the events to hear from citizens.

Citizens are also encouraged to call in or send in ideas. They may call Metro's Transportation Hotline at 797-1900 to leave a message. They may send e-mail to [www.metro-region.org](http://www.metro-region.org) or written suggestions to the Metro Council Outreach Office, 600 NE Grand Avenue, Portland, OR 97232. Metro provides regional services to 1.3 million people living in 24 cities and 3 counties. Metro works to help guide growth and to help create livable communities for the future.

## Applications available

The Portland Urban Forestry Commission is now accepting applications for the third Annual Bill Natio Award. The award was created in honor of the late builder and community leader who did so much to beautify Portland with trees.

Bill rarely missed an urban Forestry Commission meeting, which he founded in 1974 and chaired until his death. No

one in Portland has been more tenacious as Bill Natio encouraging the planting of trees. Through his humor, persistence and imaginative approach to projects, he inspired many individuals to recognize the beauty trees bring to our city.

Bill Natio Award was created to honor the stories of individuals, organizations or

projects that have continued Bill's work and reflect his dedication. The Awards will be presented at Portland's Annual Arbor Celebration on April 5th. Applications must be received by Portland's Annual Arbor Celebration on April 5th. Applications must be received by February 15th. Contact Urban Forestry Coordinator at 823-4443 for an application packet.

## Business Training For Oregon's Fastest Growing Entrepreneurs

Demographics show women and minorities are starting businesses faster than the general population. What is being done to meet the challenge of this growing market in Oregon and southwest Washington?

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce have formed an alliance to provide a series of technical training workshops to increase eco-

nomic opportunities for entrepreneurs, especially women and minorities. Humberto Reyna, President of the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, states that he is committed to working with SBA to ensure that women and minorities participate in the 1999 workshops. The '99 four part training series, entitled "Creating A Successful Business," addresses marketing and Sales, Business Planning, International

Trade Practices, as well as Financial Management. The workshops, which are scheduled for January 29, March 18, April 29 and June 3 respectively, will take place at the Work Force Training Center, 18624 NW Walker Road, Room 1506B Beaverton, OR from 8:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. the cost for the series is \$80 or \$25 for individual classes. The fee includes lunch, most materials, and community education credit.

## Community Enrichment Program

We are excited to share with you a unique program that will benefit the productivity, efficiency and economy of our community and your efforts to share quality information. The Community Enrichment Program is based on the belief that dysfunctional behavior is a primary process in our community which, if allowed to progress untreated, will result in severe physical, personal and social problems. As with others progressive programs, however, dysfunctional behavior is responsive to education. Education and support in the early stages is particularly effective.

The Community Enrichment Program is designed to provide intensive education and support to individuals with dysfunctional behaviors and their

family members at the time when the education and support can be most effective: during the early and middle stages of dysfunction.

This program is designed to be utilized by persons who need not necessarily be removed from gainful employment, daily activities, family relationships, or those who necessitate minimal detoxification, but who are experiencing the increasingly debilitating effects of dysfunctional behaviors.

The community Enrichment Program achieves the following goals:

1. To interrupt the abuse behavior and to confront the participants with the effects of verbal, mental, and physical abuse;
2. To provide the therapeutic envi-

ronment in which the participants can explore and resolve personal, family social and work problems related to dysfunctional behaviors;

3. To educate the participants of the program about the process of dysfunctional behaviors and its effects on the family and employment;

4. To establish the participants in a discovery program which will ensure self-discipline, self-control and personal growth; and

5. To serve as an educational and professional resource for the judicial and school systems, business and professional community on the problem of dysfunctional behaviors.

Thank you for your support in this new 1999 Community Enrichment Program.



Just think: Your son is bright, healthy and headed for college one day. You love the direction your

career has taken. You're doing a lot of the things you planned and even a few you didn't. Living life to the fullest is easy when you have family behind you. American Family Insurance. Call and talk to one of our helpful, friendly agents. You'll find out why we're consistently rated A+ (Superior) by A.M. Best, the insurance rating authority. Then, go on. Dream. Plan. What you do next is up to you and we'll be here to help you.

*You* have family behind you.

All Your Protection Under One Roof.



American Family Mutual Insurance Company and Subsidiaries, Madison, Wisconsin 53783-0001 [www.amfam.com](http://www.amfam.com)