

Women Climbin' High

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When it comes to pressing on despite of, and paving the way for others, Margaret Carter, Kay Toran and Jaki Walker stand out. This trio of African-American women has worked to put this state in the forefront of politics, housing and service to children and families.

As each leaves her current position, they all say that their mothers played an integral role in their success. The lessons they learned from their mothers will continue to play a part in their future careers, which include becoming authors and entrepreneurs.

Margaret Carter

After an incident with an abusive husband in 1967, Margaret Carter headed to Portland — a place she had only dreamed about.

"I left Shreveport, Louisiana with five babies, a hundred dollars in my pocket and no place to stay. Period."

She never regretted it.

Carter retired as a state representative and as a counselor of 25 years at Portland Community College-Cascade campus earlier this year. She continues to work at PCC as a community workforce specialist. She also has started her own business, M.Carter and Associates, and will become a lobbyist. In 2001, she plans to run for the state Senate.

Oregon's term limits prevented her from seeking another term as state representative.

"You can't change from the outside, you must make change from within," Carter said of politics.

Carter's mother, Emma, believed the same thing in addition to hard work.

At the age of 7, Carter went door-to-door with her mother to register black people to vote in Shreveport, La.

Her father, Rev. Hilton Hunter held NAACP meetings at his church.

The Ku Klux Klan threatened her parents, once running them off the road.

But that never deterred her parents' efforts to use the political system to make positive change for their community.

Carter has done the same thing for her community.

During her time in the Legislature, Carter helped make the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday a state holiday. She won legislation requiring the state to divest from



Kay Toran (left), Jaki Walker (center) and Margaret Carter (right) share a friendship and a deep regard for serving the Portland communities.

South Africa. She also sponsored a law creating enterprise zones designed to attract businesses to economically depressed areas. She pushed legislation to retrain workers and upgrade the skills of the Oregon workforce.

Although Carter has worked hard to ensure a better Oregon, she said her biggest accomplishment is gaining a masters degree while running a household with a husband and nine children.

Eventually, Carter married again in 1970, and added four more children to her five. Maintaining a household with nine children while studying for a masters degree was not easy. "It was the greatest challenge to prepare a four-course meal each night, keep up with all the kids' activities and at the same time prepare for academic success," Carter

said. "But it is a challenge I hold dear. I know that anyone who can manage a house with nine kids and a husband, can run a corporation."

Kay Toran

Loaded down with dreams, determination and a sense of adventure, Benjamin and Mary Rose Dean arrived in Portland from Alabama.

The Deans, after working in the shipyards among other things, eventually opened a successful beauty/barbershop in 1952, that operates still today as Portland's oldest black-owned business.

"They believed in setting your goals," said their daughter, Kay Toran. "They believed obstacles are there for you to figure out to remove them or get around them."

During her journey through management positions within

state government, Toran held to her parents' belief, never allowing an obstacle to become a permanent fixture.

Toran, the former director of the state office for services to children and families lauded for turning the agency around, retired from her position in February though she still works for the agency as a consultant until her replacement is hired. In the meantime, Toran has ventured into another career as an author.

Toran, the mother of two adult children, is currently writing a book about her journey through senior management in state government. The title has not been decided, she said. But the subtitle is, "Lessons Lived, Lessons Learned, Lessons to be Learned: An African-American Woman's Perspective."

Toran, who jokes that her age is somewhere between Margaret Carter and Jaki Walker, said she has spent more than 30 years in state govern-

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