

Preserving Historic Commerical Sites

By Sean O'Shea for The Portland Observer

Many ethnic neighborhoods contain a wealth of historic structures. In towns across the nation, minority neighborhoods are among the oldest in the community. As wealthy citizens abandoned older neighborhoods for newer and more fashionable addresses, lower income families moved in. These families and businesses were often unable to afford the popular remodeling "upgrades" that so harmed the historic character of other neighbor-



Loretta Vargas and Maribel Leon, owner of El Guineo.

tax credits, which allow portions of the cost of project to be refunded in the form of tax credits. Historic buildings are at their most vulnerable when they are vacant. Neighborhoods that have few services and businesses will likely lose population, creating a downward spiral of population loss and going-out-of-business sales. Furthermore, a beautifully restored building with a "for rent" sign in the window does little to help the local economy. So the best thing for both historic buildings and inner city neighborhoods is to have

at the edge of town. In some cases local governments will pick up as much as 50% of the cost of massive projects by powerful developers and banks. When was the last time a city picked up half the cost of establishing a small business in an older neighborhood? Healthy businesses in mixed-use neighborhoods are essential for the stability of older areas. Not only do the businesses add to the tax base of an area, and protect the historic buildings they occupy from demolition, but they also create a sense of community as local residents live, work, and shop in their neighborhoods. This helps keep cars off the road as residents can easily walk to local establishments, rather than be forced to use their cars for even the simplest errands, as is the case in the suburbs. It also prevents less-mobile residents from being cut off from goods and services. It generates activity in the neighborhood, which deters crime and encourages growth. Furthermore, local, small businesses

rehabilitated buildings filled with thriving businesses. Unfortunately, many inner city business are having trouble staying afloat. Small-business loans and building rehabilitation grants would go a long way in improving and stabilizing inner-city historic neighborhoods. The amount of money needed to turn entire neighborhoods around would be a fraction of that spent by municipalities in meeting the demands of corporate retailers. Billions are spent annually by cities across the country to pave the way (literally) for corporate commercial development

offer employment opportunities and independence from suburban retailers. Preservation of individual buildings can often occur because of philanthropy, far-sighted developers, or grass roots efforts. But the preservation of historic neighborhoods can only occur when the businesses in those districts are thriving. Therefore it is essential that public money be made available to small-business owners in historic areas. This will not only improve the quality of life for the neighborhood's residents but also save a great many historic structures.



Chelene Johnson (left) and Rosie Dean, owner of Doris's Cafe.

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Minority business is the economic reality of the new millenium. The City of Portland, Multnomah County, Port of Portland and Portland Development Commission are committed to building the economic vitality of the Portland region's diverse businesses by utilizing fair contracting and employment practices to ensure equal opportunity for all citizens.

We appreciate this special opportunity to recognize and celebrate the many valuable contributions made by minority businesses in the metropolitan area.



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Portland Development Commission
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