



CAREERS 2002

Local employment agency stands out for rapid reemployment.

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THE WEEK IN REVIEW

U.S. Had Agents Inside Al-Qaeda
WASHINGTON — U.S. intelligence overheard al-Qaeda operatives discussing a major pending terrorist attack in the weeks before Sept. 11 and had agents inside the terror group, but the intercepts and field reports lacked detail about where or when a blow would fall, according to U.S. officials.

Pakistan Says Nukes May Be Used, Agrees to Summit

ALMATY, Kazakhstan — Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf said that possessing nuclear weapons implies there are circumstances under which they will be used, but said it is irresponsible for a leader to discuss such things. He also said he was willing to meet with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to defuse the crisis between the two nations.

Catholics Want Priests Removed

Weeks of efforts by Roman Catholic leaders to show they're responding to the church's sexual abuse crisis have had no impact on Catholic opinion: Most U.S. Catholics say leaders are doing "a bad job," and nearly 80% demand no tolerance for abusive priests.

Lawsuits Accuse Airlines of Profiling

WASHINGTON — Five men who say they were barred from airline flights because they appeared to be Arabs will sue four airlines, their lawyers said. The lawsuits accuse the airlines of discrimination unrelated to security, the American Civil Liberties Union says.

Final Goodbye at Ground Zero

NEW YORK — Hundreds of relatives of people lost on Sept. 11 joined hands at the site of the World Trade Center as those hit hardest by terrorism sought solace at an interfaith memorial ceremony marking the end of the recovery effort.

White House Plan Would Create Palestinian State

WASHINGTON — The United States is working on a Middle East peace proposal that would include creating an independent Palestinian state, senior administration officials said. Such a plan would go a step further than the previous U.S. position, which was merely to endorse the idea.

Nuclear Fears Spur Evacuation Plan

As border tensions heighten between nuclear powers Pakistan and India, a U.S. government team is in India to plan the possible evacuation of 1,100 U.S. troops and up to 63,000 U.S. citizens from both countries.

Miss Russia Named Miss Universe

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Oxana Fedorova of Russia won the 2002 Miss Universe crown, wearing a white evening gown and telling a roaring audience that she blushes when she says the wrong thing.

Student Loan Rates at Historic Low

Interest rates on most government-backed student loans will fall to 4.06% from 5.99% on July 1, based on a recent auction of three-month Treasury bills. The 4.06% rate would be the lowest in the history of the loan program.

Janitors Plead for Jobs

School Board's June 10 vote will decide custodians' fate

BY DAVID PLECHL
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The first thing you notice when you walk into head custodian Dan Strong's boiler room at Astor Middle School in north Portland are the floors. They are immaculately painted and buffed with obvious pride to a glossy blue finish.

Most everything in the room has received this kind of attention to detail. Cans of WD40 are lined up like soldiers awaiting orders. Everything is in its place and there's a place for everything.

"I've invested a lot of my own money in this boiler room," Strong says, "not because I had to, I just wanted everything to be perfect."

Strong is one of 330 Local 140 union-represented custodians that would lose their jobs if a plan to use contract labor for janitorial services is approved June 10 by the Portland School Board.

The district expects the move will shave \$4.5 million from a projected \$36 million shortfall for the upcoming school year.

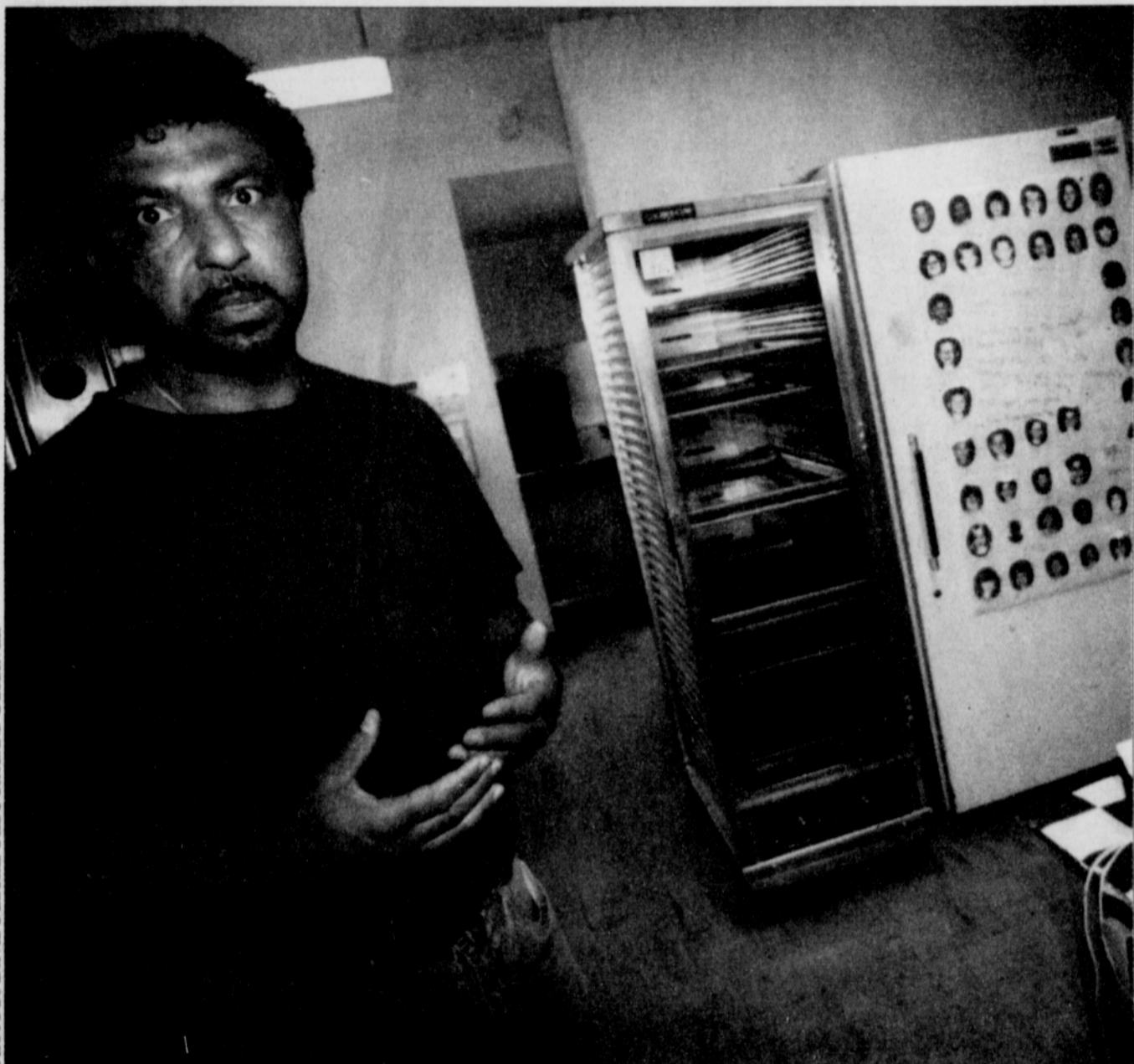
A union counter proposal to keep the workforce that slices nearly \$2 million in job compensation and benefits, has been rejected by the board.

Ken Cropper, the political organizer for Local 140, accuses the board of acting irresponsibly, believing it does not fully understand the varied responsibilities of the janitors.

"It would be a huge mistake to let this resource go," Cropper said. "These guys are far beyond just cleaners."

The janitors also work closely with food service workers who are employed under the same union. Of the food service employees, Strong says, "We make their operation function."

The janitors are even called to work alongside the Portland Fire Marshall and Portland Police. Strong recalls a recent incident where a bank robbery took place just blocks from Astor. He was called to lock the school down and wait for word



Dan Strong, head custodian at Astor Middle School in north Portland, argues that the safety of students would suffer if the school district decides to use a private company to replace the district's custodian workforce.

from police to open the school back up.

During extreme cold weather, janitors may be required to keep the school warm 24 hours a day to keep pipes from freezing.

"You have to be there to spot a problem," Strong says. "We play many roles. Sometimes we're counselors, other times we gotta be the teacher."

Many of the custodians have worked for the school district for years. Two thirds of them have 10 years experience. One fifth have over 20 years on the job. In some cases, two or three generations have been gainfully employed.

For many, the jobs have also been a step into the middle class. Current wages

range from approximately \$24,000 to \$40,000 a year, with minority representation at a steady 25 percent.

Cropper contends the proposed cuts are part of a much broader issue dealing

It would be a huge mistake to let this resource go. These guys are far beyond just cleaners.

— Ken Cropper, political organizer for Local 140.

with the state trying to do away with many of its middle-income public sector jobs.

Under the little known, "Products of Disabled Individuals Law", government agencies are obliged to give priority to contract work by

non-profit organizations that employ substantial amounts of the disabled.

So far, Portland Habilitation Center appears to have the edge over smaller

bidders for the custodial work in Portland's schools. PHC offers low wage jobs to primarily disabled workers.

PHC's knowledge of the district's boiler operations has been called into question by the union. Cropper doubts a low wage, contracted workforce that's unfamiliar with the boilers can safely maintain the equipment as the union has done.

Each school has a unique boiler. They can be touchy and dangerous under the supervision of someone who isn't familiar with the subtleties of their operation. Cropper brought up cases in other parts of the country where explosions have occurred because those in charge were not adequately trained.

"Fortunately we haven't had any accidents," he said, "because we have had very capable people."

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Suspect Charged in Teen's Murder, Other Rapes



Melissa Bittler



Ladon Stephens



There are similarities between the police sketch used to help find a rape and murder suspect and the defendant.

(AP) — Portland Police have charged a suspect in the rape and murder of 14-year-old Melissa Bittler, a northeast Portland girl who was found dead in the backyard of a neighbor's home last December.

Ladon Andre Stephens, 33, of northeast Portland, was arrested April 29 after a woman in her early 20s identified him as the man who raped her, said police chief Mark Kroeker.

Subsequent DNA analysis, which was

returned from the Oregon Crime Lab last Wednesday, linked Stephens to Bittler's murder on Dec. 13.

Stephens will also be charged with four other rapes, three of which happened in 1997 and involved teenage

girls walking to or from schools in north and northeast neighborhoods, Kroeker said.

"I want to appeal to anyone who may have been affected by him to now come forward," Kroeker said at a press conference with Bittler's parents, Mary and Tom, at his side.

Melissa Bittler had been headed to school on Dec. 13 from her home in the Wilshire neighborhood, but never made it to the bus.

"It's been a very tough five months," Tom Bittler said. "This doesn't bring her back, but it keeps an ugly person off the streets."

In 1990, Stephens served the first of three consecutive six-year prison terms after trying to abduct three young girls at gunpoint. He was sentenced before state-mandated guidelines took effect and was released in 1996.

Northwest Conference on Slavery Reparations Saturday

Representatives from Portland and other northwest cities will meet in Centralia, Wash. Saturday, June 8, to discuss reparations for black slavery.

The National Reparations Convention committee, Northwest Region, will host the conference.

Emphasis will be placed on the involvement of the clergy and elected officials in the reparations movement.

Organizers are calling on black church leaders and public officials to play important roles and assume clear responsibilities as the reparations agenda continues to unfold on national and global fronts.

Other items of interest before the

will be proposals related to reparations in the state Legislatures of Oregon and Washington. A national rally on the issue, scheduled for Aug. 17 in Washington, D.C., will also be discussed.

Organizations participating will include The National Reparations Convention, the National Black United Front and the

National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America.

Saturday's Northwest Task Force Leadership Conference on Reparations will take place at the The Inn at Centralia, 702 Harrison Ave. from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For additional information, call 503-679-5410 or 206-723-0865.

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