

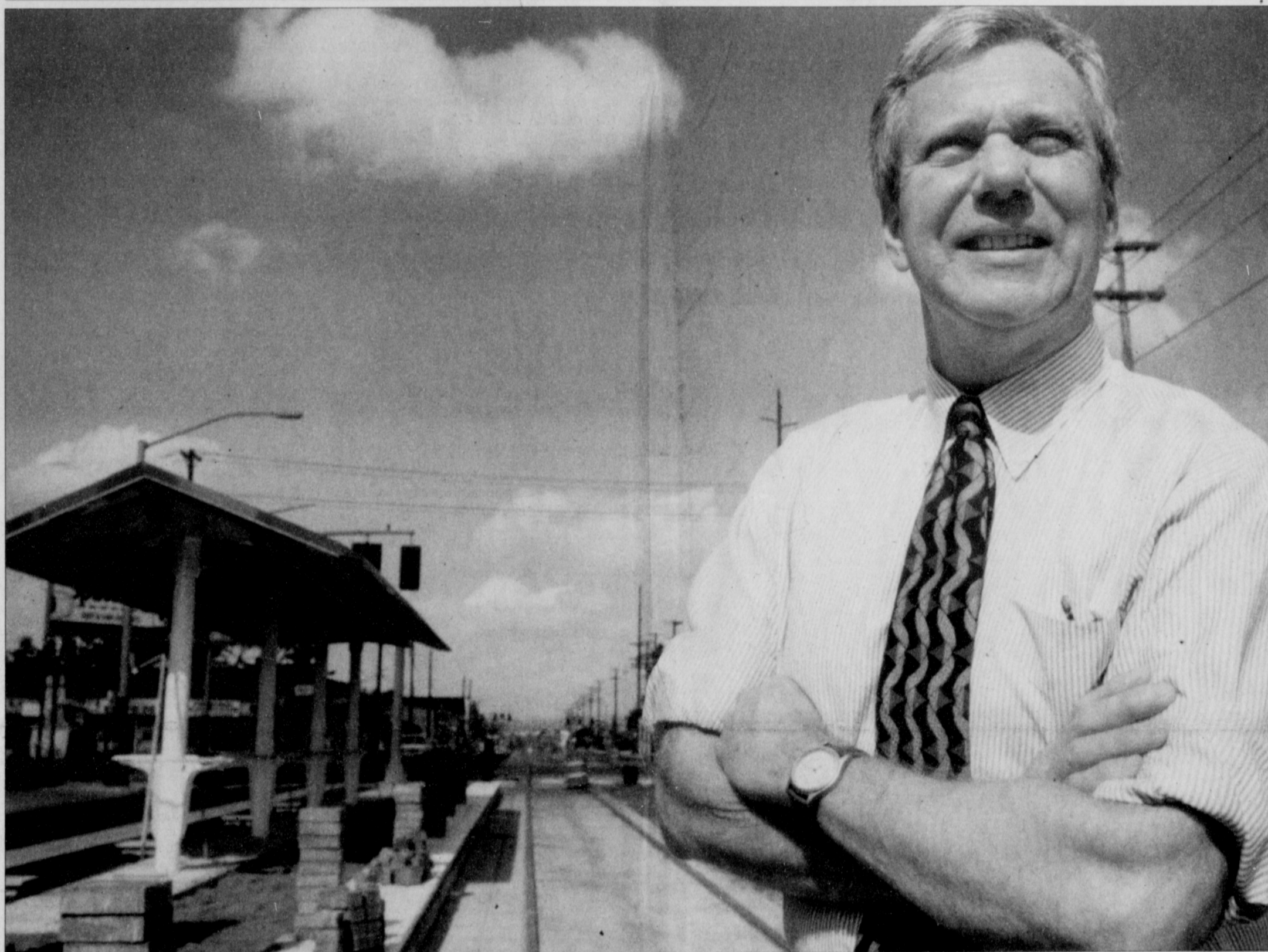
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SECTION B

MINORITY ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT WEEK



Tri-Met General Manager Fred Hansen has dedicated the transit agency to providing both economic and transportation benefits to the African American community during and after the construction of the Interstate Max light rail line through north Portland.

PHOTO BY DAVID PLECHL/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Making Connections

Interstate Max cements lasting ties with minority businesses and community

BY DAVID PLECHL
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Tri-met is building a \$350 million light rail project in your backyard. Are you concerned? You bet you are.

The 5.6 mile stretch from the Rose Quarter to the Expo Center in north Portland spans one of the most ethnically diverse areas the light rail Max has come to so far.

The project tests Tri-Met's ability to work cooperatively with minorities and low income neighbors frustrated by previous city projects that have pushed their interests aside.

Fred Hansen, general manager of Tri-Met since 1998, is trying to change all that. He has encouraged an atmosphere of openness and cooperation.

"It's not just about mobility," says Hansen, "it's about building community."

So far, Tri-Met's ability to actively reach out to minority businesses and cooperate with those under construction has sig-

naled a turning point in community relations.

It's an approach Hansen takes very seriously.

"Public participation isn't just a box that you check at the end of the day," he contends, "you have to be able to act on what the community says."

Area residents and minority business leaders have said they wanted to be part of the project, wanted their voices heard, their needs met and wanted to be employed in the light-rail construction.

Part of the success of the project has been linked to Hansen's willingness to seek out minority contractors and subcontractors frustrated by previous projects.

Helping fulfill that commitment is manager of diversity Bruce Watts.

Watts has helped Tri-Met reach out to all levels of the business community.

An active member of the African American community, Watts was heading up the

Coalition of Black Men when he first drew Tri-Met's attention.

Impressed with his involvement in the community and insight into African American based interests, Watts was just what Hansen was looking for.

Hansen addressed Watts squarely, "You have a chance to be an advocate

"My firm belief is that to have a healthy community, people need jobs," says Watts.

Right from the start, five potential contractors presented their proposals not only to Tri-Met, but before a community advisory board as well.

"Some were very good, but had no experience working in minority communi-

In addition, subcontracts were broken down in size to increase accessibility to smaller contractors.

The effort has already out \$5 million into the hands of minority owned subcontracting firms in north and northeast Portland.

"We've provided opportunities for African American, minority, and women owned businesses," Watts said.

Leo Burrel of "A Quality Weldor" is one such example. Burrel is self-employed by choice in order to focus on the quality of his work. Watts encouraged Burrel to seek out employment on the project.

"They are really trying to get some of these contractors to use smaller guys," says Burrel. Though he was impressed with Tri-met's efforts to keep smaller businesses on-the-job, he also realized there were some limitations in working with larger contractors.

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Public participation isn't just a box that you check at the end of the day. You have to be able to act on what the community says.

—Tri-Met General Manager Fred Hansen

from the outside or a decision maker from the inside."

Watts decided to accept that challenge.

Traditionally an advocate for African American contractors, Watts first started consulting Tri-met on the oversight of construction and minority relations.

ties," Hansen explained.

Ultimately the five contractors were narrowed to just two.

"Stacy and Witbeck (the project's prime contractor) shared these values," says Hansen. "F.E. Ward (another chief contractor) was equally enthusiastic."



Restoring Homes

Israel Davis runs his own home construction business as an expert craftsman in the restoration of old homes.

See inside, page B9



Dixon's Ribs Rule

James and Marie Dixon display tempting foods made at their restaurant, Dixon's Rib Pit, located at 5804 N. Interstate Ave.

See inside, page B7



Having Coffee and Dessert

The espresso, sandwich and dessert shop was the realization of a lifelong dream for Anita Smith.

See inside, page B4