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Martin Luther King Jr. Edition

The Portland Observer is proud to present this special Martin Luther King Jr. edition. See how kids at King School in northeast Portland live with King's vision everyday. Experience King's visit to Portland in 1961 through the eyes of a man who met the African American leader at the Vancouver Avenue Baptist Church, and get an inside look at how King worked with three American presidents to bring change to a country torn apart by racism. These and many more stories are inside this special edition as we honor America's civil rights leader on the occasion of the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday, observed this year on Monday, Jan. 20. — See Section B, inside



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Week in The Review

Stray dogs follow noses into jobs

Faced with a rapid rise in the number of stray dogs in Bangkok, Thai police have decided to put the canines to work sniffing out illicit drugs. Justice Minister Purachai Piumsombun says the first batch of 100 abandoned hounds with wet noses, good health and no skin problems have begun training in narcotics sniffing and will eventually be deployed at train stations and airports.

City bans smelly people from buses

You better hit the shower before you board the bus in Bend. Proposed new city rules would ban spitting, smoking, skateboarding, and stinking on city buses. The regulations ban anyone who "emanates a grossly repulsive odor that is unavoidable by other Bend Extended Area Transit customers" from being in the bus station or on a bus.

Man tries to sell his family on eBay

Writer Steve Young has been able to peddle his prose all of his life so he decided to give selling his family a try. After consulting with wife Diana, and their two children, Kelly, 9, and Casey, 8, Young decided to put his family on the auction block. Young said he posted the ad Thursday on eBay and received more than 10,000 hits within minutes. Young said the auction winner would receive a lifetime of platonic companionship, including invitations to family outings and holiday gatherings as well as tips on writing, gardening and cooking. The minimum bid was \$5 million.

Sufferers drop pants, pray for relief

Hemorrhoid sufferers are flocking to a church in central Portugal in the belief exposing their afflicted behinds to the statue of a local saint will cure them. The suffering faithful in Murtosa, 250 kilometers north of Lisbon, attribute St. Goncalo with the power to cure the condition. The 13th-century priest also has a reputation for curing acne and helping women find husbands.

Storks' deliveries upset villagers

A Thai village is in a flap over thousands of migrating storks and the stench from their droppings, which has forced villagers to wear face masks and block doors and windows to keep out the suffocating smell. Officials in Ban Tan, a village about 60 kilometers north of Bangkok, say they have no idea how to protect the village from the birds, which have built nests on rooftops and in trees after flying south for the winter.



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Ron Weber answers questions from students at Sabin School in northeast Portland during a presentation on African American history.

EMOTIONAL JOURNEY

Man spreads word of Martin Luther King Jr. and other African American heroes

BY MICHAEL LEIGHTON
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Ron Weber's heart is tugging. He's drawn awake by the drama of American heroes who survived the horrors of slavery and lived to make this country a better place for all. It won't be long before he records his thoughts and shares them with others.

Weber is a retired electrician with the state prison system who now spends much of his time writing and telling stories about African American history.

Past lives that move him most are of African American women of the 1800s—people like Harriett Tubman who helped slaves escape from the South and Sojourner Truth who beat the odds and overcame slavery herself.

Weber became immersed in black history several years ago when he set his eyes on a picture of Tubman. He began to read about her life and soon was stirred to action by America's past.

"I started to have dreams," Weber re-

called. "I was a black slave running in the swamp. Tubman was yelling at me to keep running, keep running. I could hear dogs, horses and screaming men tracking me."

His interest in the lives of these early American freedom fighters grew to a passion.

"I just started telling these stories," Weber said. "Everywhere I went, on the bus, the grocery store and in the coffee

"I do all this writing and speaking for free. It's my small part in the process of retribution for the terrible things we did to African Americans."

shop."

This Portland native and graduate of Jesuit High School and Portland State University is now an authority in black history. He is a frequent guest writer on the subject for the Portland Observer and speaks regularly in schools, museums, history centers and diversity workshops.

"I do all this writing and speaking for free," he said. "It's my small part in the

process of retribution for the terrible things we did to African Americans."

Weber finds it appalling that so little history of African Americans is shared in our schools today.

The descendants of Mother Africa "built this country with their sweat, blood and their own lives," he said. "They were dragged to a foreign land and enslaved for centuries. What bothers me is we tried to hide it. African Americans suffered and died for hundreds of years, so we could have it so good."

Weber is inspired from the histories of black Americans during the 20th Century as well—people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks—whose battles for freedom brought gains in civil rights, employment opportunities and voting rights.

They lived lives that bought prosperity to all, he said, giving people of all races the ability to "live freely in a democratic county where you can go where you want, do what you want, marry who you want and live the good life."

Weber describes King as "a great

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Civil Rights Holiday Did Not Come Without Turmoil

Martin Luther King Jr. Day adoption followed rocky road

BY LEE PERLMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

As an activist, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. walked for miles, was spat upon, pelted with rocks, thrown into prison cells and ultimately murdered in pursuit of civil rights.

Perhaps it is fitting, then, that the honors accorded him did not come quickly or easily.

Rep. John Conyers of Michigan proposed King's birthday in January a national holiday four days after King was shot in Memphis in 1968. For years, however, the idea languished. Some opposition simply did not like King or his ideals. Critics said that the country already had holidays, and that each cost the state and local jurisdictions millions of

dollars in paid vacations.

At that time, the only American person whose birthday was a holiday nationally and in each state was George Washington. People questioned whether King carried the same stature as the nation's first president and if he should be honored to the exclusion of other worthy people such as early feminist Susan B. Anthony?

Some public service unions were not willing to have the holiday at the expense of others they already enjoyed.

Supporters of the holiday such as Conyers



Martin Luther King Jr.

and entertainer Harry Belafonte doggedly pushed for the holiday, collecting six million signatures of support. Finally, on Aug. 2nd 1983, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 338 to 90 to enact the holiday.

The U.S. Senate followed suit on Oct. 19, voting 78 to 22 for the measure. First, however, Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina made a speech denouncing King, whom he accused of adultery and

aiding Communist causes. Senators Daniel Moynihan of New York and Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts in turn took

Helms to task, Moynihan throwing a copy of Helms' speech to the senate floor.

On the day President Ronald Reagan signed the bill into law, Kennedy said, "With this holiday, Dr. King takes his place as the father of the second American revolution, the revolution for civil rights."

By then, 24 states had already adopted the day as a holiday. Oregon's turn came in 1985—by a very bumpy road. First, the House passed a bill by Rep. Margaret Carter, 52 to 4 on May 3. Then, by a 29 to 2 vote, the Senate passed a similar version by the late Sen. Bill McCoy.

Both proposals needed negotiations to reconcile which public officials would get what holidays and how they would be paid. Issues remained on the table long after Gov. Victor Atiyeh signed the measure on July 11. The Portland City Council passed a similar

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