

Urban League Gets New President

continued from Front

finding homes for low-income residents.

"It was the hardest job I've ever had," Gaston said. "Every day I'd come to work and see these people with nothing to eat and nowhere to sleep."

Although her job gave her a great deal of respect and appreciation for the hard work done by social services employees, Gaston said it was discouraging because the center was always full to capacity and it was hard to turn people away each day.

When a position handling geriatric admissions for Western State Hospital, a government-run mental hospital in Washington, opened up, Gaston jumped at the chance.

"Mental health was something I had never done before," she said. "To see people institutionalized will really open your eyes."

Her job working the intake desk at Western brought her into contact with mentally ill people with limited resources, sometimes without any family support networks and often times no access to medication.

She said she liked the job, but wanted to do more. So she went back to school, enrolling at Evergreen State University, where she earned a degree in Organizational Development in 1995. While in school, Gaston worked as a financial case manager for Washington State's Department of Social and Health Services. She determined eligibility for welfare services for low-income residents. It was this job that finally sunk the hook for Gaston to stay in social services for the long haul.



PHOTO BY WYNDE DYER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Vanessa Gaston, the new president and chief executive officer for the Urban League of Portland, talks with Oregon Health and Science University's Richard Loudd about the HIV/AIDS awareness program and community outreach program he operates for the Urban League.

"It was busy work and it was hard work," she said. "But at the end of the day I went home and I knew I'd really helped someone."

Her peers and supervisors recognized her leadership skills and began assigning her to the tasks that no one else wanted to tackle. When she did well, she was promoted to assistant supervisor and then supervisor of the department's financial offices.

"My career just skyrocketed," Gaston said.

Her success gave her the opportunity to move on from the operational side of social services pro-

grams to the developmental side. When the Clinton Administration implemented the Welfare Reform Act in 1997, Gaston became a welfare reform coordinator for the state of Washington. She was responsible for developing local policies for reform, training staff and educating the community about welfare reform.

"At that time there was a total change in mind set about how we were doing things," Gaston said. "All of a sudden these people who were receiving welfare needed assistance in getting off it."

Gaston moved into the legisla-

tive arena at the capitol in Olympia where she designed two welfare reform policies - the Work First Sanction Policy and the Limited English Pathway - to sanction welfare recipients who were not actively seeking work and to help immigrants and refugees navigate complex federal, state and local resources to gain self-sufficiency.

Gaston then took a job as Deputy Administrator for Washington's largest community service organization in Seattle. She ran the office, managed the staff and budget and did community outreach for an extremely diverse office. Her clients

spoke more than 40 different languages and her staff at least 20.

"I had to learn to wear many different hats at that job," Gaston said. "In the end I realized that I wanted something a little more focused."

Obtaining a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Washington State University gave her that chance. When she interviewed in front of a 13-member panel for her position as Assistant Superintendent at Washington Soldiers Home and Colony in Orting, Wash., a

Gaston said.

She was being considered for the Superintendent's position when the position at the Urban League of Portland opened up.

"I remembered my work in the Department of Social Services and how much I enjoyed that work," Gaston said. "Helping people is what I really have a passion for and everything I had learned elsewhere will allow me to focus on that here."

At the end of a seven-month selection process, Gaston is very happy to be settling into her new

Helping people is what I really have a passion for and everything I had learned elsewhere will allow me to focus on that here.

-Vanessa Gaston, on her new job as President and CEO of the Urban League of Portland

home that provides human services and long-term care for Veterans, Gaston never thought she would get the job.

"I had no experience in long-term care whatsoever," she said. "But I guess they were impressed."

Gaston was second in charge at the 10-building, 183-acre, 24-hour care facility with 183 residents and 174 staff members. She said Washington's Veteran's Affairs is unique in that it is a revenue-generating operation. The Soldiers Home actually operated like a business in that by keeping the beds full and fundraising, it was able to make money to provide services to get veterans back on their feet.

"I really learned a lot there,"

job, where she will be responsible for the overall management of the office, budget and staff.

She will represent the Urban League in fundraising endeavors in the community and help the League continue to serve seniors, at-risk youth and promote economic development for African Americans and other minorities.

Gaston said she is pleased to be close enough to her family in Washington and plans to stay in Portland until there is nothing else to learn and no more work to do.

"I have worked myself up from the bottom to the top rather quickly," she said. "I think now I am at a place where I would like to be for a while."

Reward Offered in Lent School Arson

Portland Fire Department arson investigators post a \$55,000 reward for information leading to an arrest in an arson fire at Lent School on the front doors of the building last week. Flyers were also sent home with all Lent students. Arson investigators have received over two dozen leads and public tips since last month's fire caused more than \$2 million damage to the school at 5105 S.E. 97th.

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER



Clinics Offer Free Eye Tests

March is National Save Your Vision Month and to celebrate the Pacific University College of Optometry Vision Centers, including a site in northeast Portland, are providing free vision screenings for children and adults of all ages.

The tests are available throughout the month of March. Normal vision function is critical in the development of learning skills for infants and children. Screening take about 30 minutes and provide important information about clarity of vision, eye health, and eye coordination - factors that are essential for good vision and healthy eyes.

Screenings are especially beneficial for younger children whose learning skills - such as reading and writing - and self-esteem in the classroom depend on good vision and healthy eyes. Screenings are also available for area schools, businesses and community organizations through Pacific's of-site screening program.

For more information, call 503-352-2020.



Giving our best.

Great Values For St. Patrick's Day!

Attention SENIORS

Safeway Senior Shuttle Service!

Introducing a great new service for our neighborhood senior citizens. FREE grocery shopping "shuttle service" to your nearby Ainsworth & MLK Blvd Safeway Food & Drug... TWICE a Month! On or around the 4th and 15th of each month. This Service is FREE to seniors age 60 and over. Please Seniors - Grandchildren and infants WILL NOT BE PERMITTED on the Shuttle at any time.



LOOK FOR OUR SPECIAL "RAZ TRANSPORTATION" TROLLEY SERVICE SCHEDULE FLYER AT YOUR MLK BLVD SAFEWAY FOR COMPLETE DETAILS!

Sponsored by:



OFFICIAL SPONSOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF OREGON

For More Information Call: 503-572-0812

Visit Safeway's Web site at www.safeway.com

Available at Safeway

PRICES EFFECTIVE MARCH 2003						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
16	17	18	12	13	14	15



Pork Shoulder Country Style Ribs

Bone-In. Valu Pack. Marinate and broil. SAVE up to \$1.50 lb.

99¢ lb

Safeway Club Price



Safeway Corned Beef Brisket

Point. Flat Cut \$1.49 lb. SAVE up to \$1.29 lb.

99¢ lb

Safeway Club Price



Red Delicious Apples

Washington grown. Great for an afternoon snack. SAVE up to \$1.70 on 2 lbs.

2 lbs for 88¢

Safeway Club Price



Kellogg's Cereal

12.6 to 17.6-oz. Selected varieties. Limit 5.

SAVE up to \$3.18 on 5

5 for \$10

Safeway Club Price

Now the savings are in the Card!

ALL LIMITS ARE PER HOUSEHOLD PER DAY!