

'Fallen Warriors' Honored

Fire Bureau Still Dominated by White Males



A historic photo of the 1964 Pacific Northwest Championship Team features many of the boxers from Knott Street.

continued ▲ from Front

respondents said they don't think a diverse work force will help the bureau serve the public any better.

Firefighters also said they don't think the bureau provides fair career and development opportunities, especially to women and minorities.

Fire Chief Ed Wilson said the survey results did not surprise him.

"It would be naive to think with 750 employees, representing four generations with different values... that

we're not going to have problems," he said. "What we're trying to do here is just change the culture. The first part of changing our culture is to identify what it is."

The bureau has made diversifying its work force more of a

priority since the mid-1990s. Women and minorities make up 18 percent of the bureau.

"It would be easy to consider this report an indictment of the management," the report said, "or to see it as a document that seeks to blame white males for the problems and issues that exist. But that oversimplification misses the point."

The Portland Fire Bureau, "like every other historically homogeneous profession, faces challenges in diversifying its work force, and... mirrors the stresses and strains going on all over the country," the report said.

Fire Commissioner Erik Sten complimented the bureau for the study.

"They're not hiding from the problem," Sten said. "The cultural assessment shows some good faith and guts on their part to have this all aired out."

They are heroes and heroines, but they are also human.

— Excerpt from a report on sexism and racism in the Portland Fire Department

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geses way before that."

Rahsaan started boxing in 1956 to protect himself from a bully who would steal his money before movies at the former Egyptian Theater. Every time Rahsaan had his money stolen, he would have to find something to entertain himself during the duration of the movie. One day his dad asked him to summarize the flick and Rahsaan got caught in a lie. His father gave him a whooping he wouldn't soon forget.

"I realized that since I couldn't beat up my dad, I'd better learn to defend myself from that bully," he said.

So he went down to Knott Street and signed up for a novice tournament for fighters with zero to six fights under their belts. Rahsaan won all four of his fights. The next time he saw the bully he refused to hand over his money.

"I told him, 'You can try to take my money, and you'll probably beat me up but it isn't going to be easy,'" he said. "He didn't lay a finger on me and never asked for my money again."

With his mission accomplished, Rahsaan laid down his boxing gloves until 1963 when Joe Hopkins needed a sparring partner to train him for the nationals. Rahsaan re-

202 to 165 pounds and won all four of his fights in the 1964 Pacific Northwest Championships in Seattle.

So Rahsaan stuck with the team, under the direction of Coach Chuck Lincoln, that had just two years before taken home two gold medals, three silver medals and the Best Team honor at the National Championships.

"We were like rock stars," Rahsaan said of the Knott Street Boxers. "For a town like Portland with a relatively small black population, everywhere we traveled we had notoriety."

Rahsaan said that while the team rarely socialized outside of practices, his fellow boxers exemplified what it meant to be a unit during the amateur boxing season. While many people think of boxing as an individual sport, Rahsaan insists otherwise. He said the team was com-

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We were like rock stars. Everywhere we traveled we had notoriety.

— Former boxer Halim Rahsaan

members when he made Hopkins, the top middleweight on the west coast, upset because Hopkins couldn't hit him.

The experience made Rahsaan start thinking about the upcoming Olympics. He wore a rubber frog suit, ran every morning and trained every night to drop his weight from

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