

Marchers demand police accountability

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chanting of, "No justice, no peace, with racist police," and other sayings reminiscent of early civil rights marches.

The parade stopped briefly at the intersection of Killingsworth and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. where march leaders from the Albina Ministerial Alliance and the NAACP joined hands with the friends and family of James.

The energetic drum beats and chanting of the crowd all quieted while a speaker called for all police officers who do injustice to the community to be "rooted out."

Marchers bowed their heads and took a moment of silence for James and other victims of police violence before regaining momentum and turning the corner where the crowd garnered honks from passing cars - some of which held signs of support out of sunroofs.

The May 5 shooting occurred when James tried to drive away from a routine traffic stop. The officer who fired the single shot said he was partly inside the car and feared for his life. The gunfire followed police attempts to bring her into custody with pepper spray, a stun gun and pulling her hair.

The conduct of police has caused outrage in Portland's African American community and the city at large.

James had a record for drug and theft charges and a warrant for her arrest when she was shot, but local residents say her past in no way justifies her death.

"Everybody does drugs once in their life," said Bambi Thompson, a marcher who added that she, too, has had guns pulled on her by the Portland Police. "Just because you do drugs doesn't mean you have to die for it - at least not at the hands of the police."

The feeling that local police are sometimes trigger happy when it comes to dealing with people of color was expressed by many rally attendees who



Kenneth James, the father of police shooting victim Kendra James, finds support during Saturday's march for justice. PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

held signs that said, "Shoot Now, Think Later," and others that called for Police Chief Mark Kroeker's resignation.

District Attorney Mike Schruck's decision to use a secret grand jury to consider possible criminal charges against the officer also angered community leaders who feel the system leans to the side of law enforcement.

The jury last week failed to indict the officer and that decision further eroded trust in the justice system.

As the crowd made its way towards the North Skidmore Street overpass where James was shot, the sadness grew as marchers faced the chain-link fence which has become a memorial to the young woman with flowers, stuffed animals and balloons.

Event organizers said they were pleased with the turnout, which they estimated at between 1,500 and 2,000.



Sen. Margaret Carter sings 'We Shall Overcome' at the head of a march for justice Saturday in memory of Kendra James, the 21-year-old mother shot and killed by police during a traffic stop. PHOTO BY MICHAEL LEIGHTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER



Marchers stretched as far as the eye could see along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard Saturday for the rally in memory of Kendra James and a call for better police accountability. PHOTO BY MICHAEL LEIGHTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Flawed System Blamed

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Chamber of Commerce and the Albina Ministerial Alliance met last week to make a list of demands.

The groups are calling for public hearings for all police shootings cases, a review of the police bureau's diversity and cultural training, more efforts to recruit and retain people of color, a review the police bureau's deadly force policy, the formation of an independent police review board with subpoena power and a study on the "culture of the police department," similar to studies in Los Angeles and Detroit.

"All these questions are definitely worthy of consideration and most of them are going to be looked into," said Tommy Brooks, spokesman for Mayor Vera Katz's office.

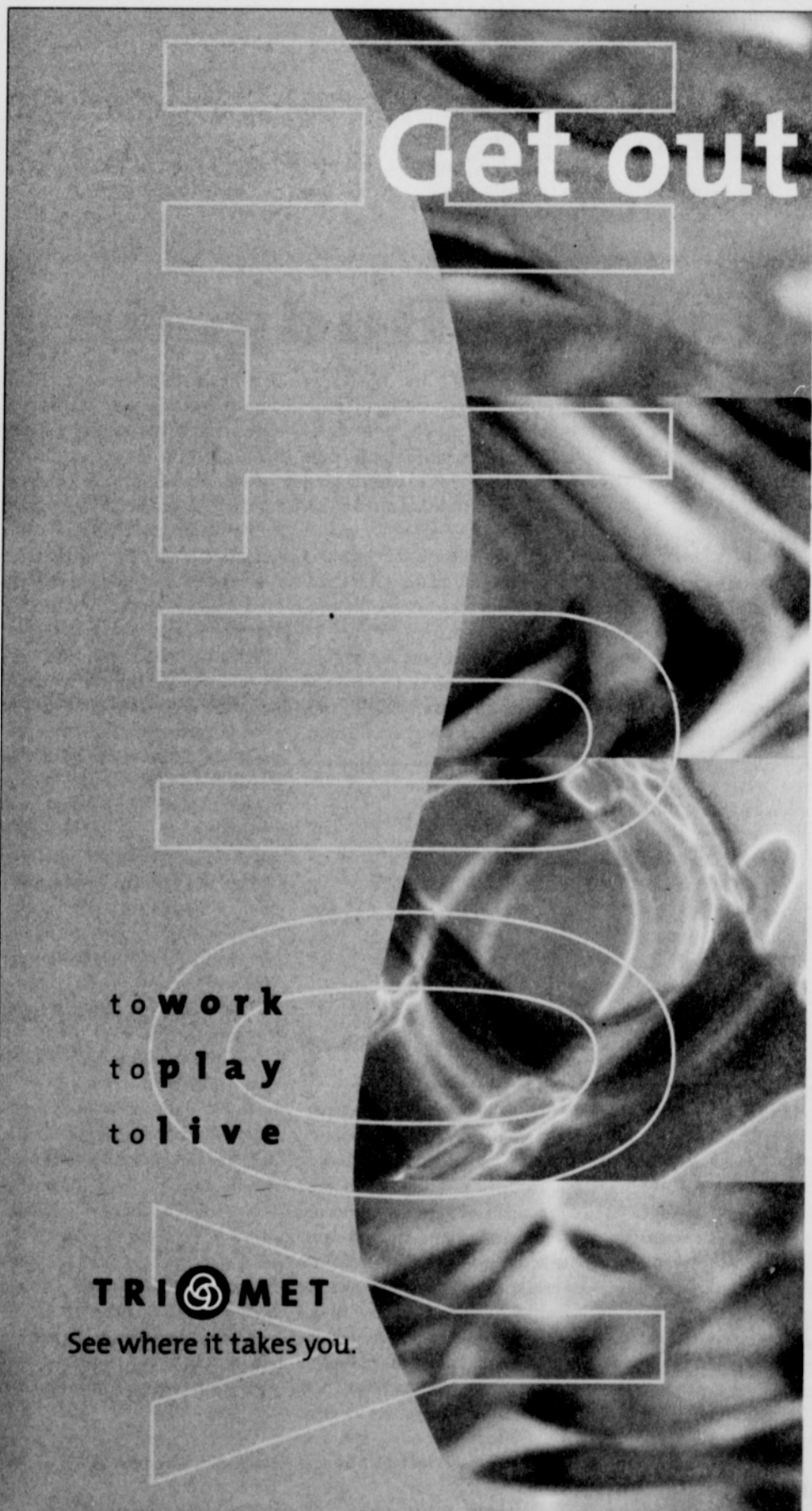
The Oregon Senate is considering legislation to change state law, specifying that deadly force only

be used when apprehending suspects of serious crimes. This bill would update Oregon's law with a 1985 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that a Tennessee officer violated an unarmed teenage burglar's constitutional rights by shooting him as he ran from the officer.

State Sen. Margaret Carter, D-Portland and Sen. Avel Gordly, D-Portland, have vowed to work within the system to change the law and secret grand jury policies.

Portland Peace Response Coalition, usually rallying against the war at Pioneer Courthouse Square, supported Kendra James by joining last Saturday's memorial march, which began at Alberta Park in northeast Portland.

"If the police officer was acting within the state law when he brought Kendra James' life to an end, then we have to change state law," said Mikel Clayhold, a PPRC volunteer.



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