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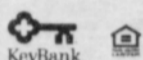


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Leading the Struggle

Affordable housing, a continuing fight

BY JAYMEE R. CUTI
 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Community development sadly plants the seeds for gentrification, according to Maxine Fitzpatrick, director of the Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives.

The non-profit corporation, with ownership of more than 245 properties in the city, inadvertently had a hand in displacing

African Americans who have called inner northeast Portland home for generations.

With that in mind, Fitzpatrick has launched a home ownership program to help minorities and low-income residents, open first to tenants already involved with PCRI.

"We probably helped gentrification somewhat because PCRI bought some of the worst developments in the community," she said.

Fitzpatrick came to Portland in 1993 from the Midwest, to help PCRI acquire and turn properties sitting empty into single-family homes for low-income families.

"We're trying to level the playing field," Fitzpatrick said, quoting statistics that only 38 percent of African Americans own their own homes in Portland, compared to 59 percent of whites.

PCRI tenants are provided with the unique opportunity of building a rental history while taking on many of the same responsibilities that homeowners experience such as balancing a budget and managing utilities.

And while participants must make less than 80 percent of the median family income to qualify for the program, Fitzpatrick says its accommodations are a higher standard than most other housing for low-income individuals.

"You wouldn't know our properties are low-income by looking at them," she said.

Securing affordable housing recently suffered a blow, as PCRI was disqualified for a \$350,000



Maxine Fitzpatrick, PCRI director, discusses the need for affordable housing in Portland.

We're trying to level the playing field.

- Maxine Fitzpatrick, PCRI director

dian income, with 80 percent as the cutoff for qualifying.

"Portland is becoming one of the least affordable cities in the nation," said Fitzpatrick.

She encourages community members to take an interest in urban planning to help keep money allocated for affordable housing in the community.

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