

# PORTRAIT of Dignity

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL RUBENSTEIN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER



Chrysler Chelle, the security coordinator and co-head of the building department at Dignity Village says the encampment helped her get off drugs. "I've gone from being a junky under a bridge to a leader in my community," she said.



The American flag flies high over Dignity Village.

**continued ▲ from Front**  
 "I was computer illiterate until I became homeless," muses McCarthy.

The Dignity Village offices are equipped with computers for business operations and personal use.

"Do I think we at Dignity Village have it made? Yes, we do," he said.

But for all the benefits the village provides, McCarthy says the rules are strict and enforced, and no one gets a free ride.

"Instead of charging anybody money, we charge them sweat equity," he says.

One of the first rules to "making it" at Dignity Village is that a "couch pass" is only worth three

nights. After that, a new resident has a week to build the 10 by 12 foot platform on which to build their house.

"We're quite talented, actually," says Chrysler Chelle, security coordinator and co-head of the building department for the Village. "We know nothing about building and construction, but all my houses are built to code."

Besides needing a motivation to build and pitch in, residents must abide by five rules or face the Council for eviction. No violence to oneself or others is tolerated. No theft is allowed. Everyone must contribute to the upkeep of the village and log 10 hours weekly. No drugs or alcohol are allowed within a one-block radius of the village. No con-

tinuous disruptive behavior is allowed.

Whether Dignity Village works like the utopia it was engineered to

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be is a matter of perspective. "If you have problems in your neighborhood, we have the same problems here," McCarthy said.

"We're not any different and we live so close together that we know everything that's going on."

"On the other hand," he adds, "if

you need help, all you have to do is ask." Chelle said some residents "think we have too many rules."

But the trade-offs are worth it for many. McCarthy values that he is able to live with his pets, a cat named Namaste and a dog named Zags. He also says many of the residents are grateful for not being hassled by cops and feel safe at their current location. Others enjoy their freedom to live with their same- or opposite-sex partners, which is not allowed in many single-occupancy shelters.

McCarthy says he is also proud of the diversity in races and religions represented at Dignity Village.

The Dignity Village council chamber is inclusive by design. On the wall hangs an illustration that can only be interpreted as a black Jesus with dreadlocks. On

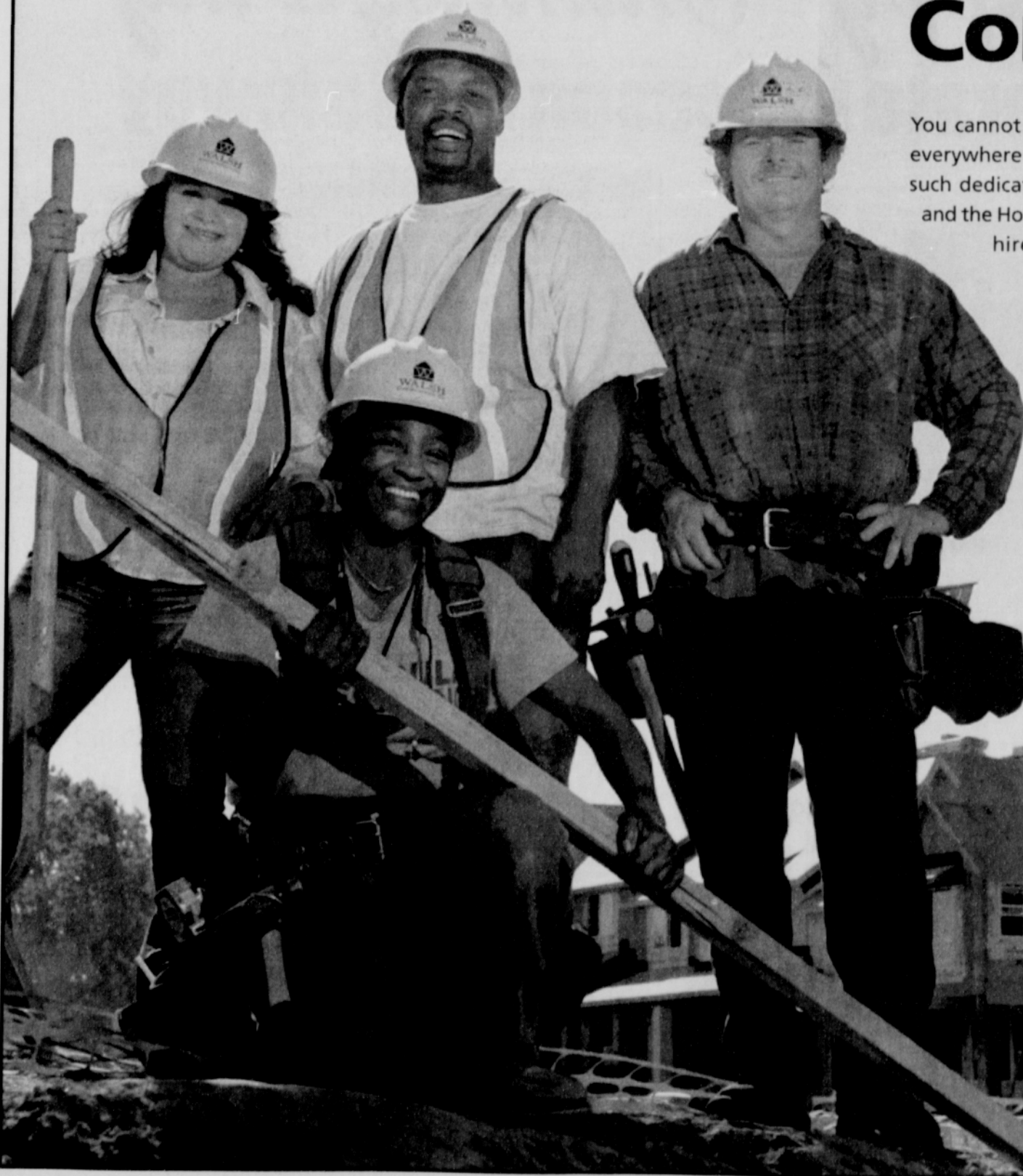
the round council table are symbols of the Star of David, a lotus blossom representing Buddha and a Druid Heart Chakra, painted in yellow and green, the tribal colors of the Patowamine Indians.

"If we get moved to another piece of land, we hope it's permanent," said McCarthy.

According to the council's proposal, an estimated \$500,000 is needed to purchase a permanent site and meet phase one of construction goals. Donations may be earmarked directly to the Dignity Village Land Acquisition Fund.

For more information about donations and volunteer opportunities, visit [www.dignityvillage.org](http://www.dignityvillage.org).

## Building Businesses. Building Communities.



You cannot mistake pride in a job well done. It can be seen everywhere you look at the New Columbia project. But then, such dedication is to be expected. Walsh Construction Co./OR and the Housing Authority of Portland helped subcontractors hire trades people from ETAP, the Evening Trades Apprenticeship Preparation program, and from the community.

This is the final bid opportunity for the project. **Come join our team.** For further information, call Carolyn Wilson at 503-222-4375 or visit our website at [www.walshconstructionco.com](http://www.walshconstructionco.com).

**Pre-bid Meeting for New Columbia Phase II Housing**

**November 9, 9-11 a.m.  
 or  
 November 12, 9:30-11:30 a.m.**

Both pre-bid meetings to be held at Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs (OAME) 4134 N. Vancouver Avenue, Portland



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