



HOUSING *Special Edition*

New Columbia: Fresh start for an old neighborhood

continued ▲ from Front

Many of the relocated families are still living on the east side of Portland, but some have ventured out to surrounding suburbs like Gresham and Fairview, while others have moved out of Multnomah County and the state.

Their relocation was supported financially with the option of moving to other public housing or being given Section 8 vouchers, which provides rent assistance. Support and counseling was given to the families through the Housing Authority, as well as moving services and transportation.

But now that they've moved and settled, are they really going to want to up and move back? Seventy percent of those responding to surveys indicated they wished to return when the relocation steps began. Today, around 40 percent plan to cash in on their moving allowance and come back, officials said.

Still, that percentage is much higher than any other Hope VI projects around the country.

The HOPE VI program was started by the Department of Housing and Urban Development's efforts to transform severely distressed public housing in 1992, but many of the projects have resulted in an urban gentrification rather than keeping low-income residents in the same spot.

"We've found that there was a real variety of responses to the relocation," said Sue Arbuthnot, a documentary filmmaker, who along with Richard Wilhelm, produced the film "Imagining Home: Stories of Columbia Villa," which recently had screenings at Portsmouth Middle School and 5th Avenue Cinema.

"A lot of people were really sad," Arbuthnot said. "There's one family that we've been following that are Angolan refugees and they've been in this country since 1990. After many years of living as refugees they felt very safe living in Columbia Villa. It was pretty disruptive for them to move. But they're very much looking forward to coming back to New Columbia."

Although the old community was often seen to outsiders as a hub of gang and drug life, such was not necessarily the case.

"It was a stigmatized neighborhood," Arbuthnot said. "There was a period in the late '80s and '90s where there was a lot of gang activity. There's such a wide array of perceptions that will have to be reckoned with in the new community."

Wilhelm said Columbia Villa was a vibrant community in spite of all the bad mouthing that's gone on over the years.

"All that was put behind them years ago," he said. "They only thing that stuck was the stigma."

Wilhelm expects the former residents that move back will regain ownership of their community.

"They loved their neighbors, they loved the ability to find so many different cultures in their block," he said.



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
New streets and sidewalks better connect New Columbia to the surrounding Portsmouth neighborhood of north Portland.

Income diversity coming

One of the ideas behind New Columbia will be integrating a mixed-income neighborhood, in hopes that those with a lower-income will mill with middle-income families.

A problem in the past with Hope VI projects has been that the poor were simply ushered out of tall high-rises and expected to put themselves somewhere else.

"It's a big social experiment and no one knows if it's going to work," Wilhelm said. "But the research says it will. Neighborhoods tend to build themselves and with the amount of work going into (New Columbia), it's getting a push-start to success."

The new site will feature 850 units, including public housing, affordable rental housing, elderly housing and homes for sale. An additional 92 public housing units will be built off-site to deal with overcrowding while making sure there is no loss of public housing in Portland. New parks, community centers and other recreational facilities will also be created.

Wilhelm said that while the stigma of public housing will be lessened with the new buildings, subtle differences may be found in the homes that are rented and those that are owned. For example, many people renting or in public housing will live in row homes.

"People who own homes will probably have garages. People who are renting probably won't," Wilhelm said.

"People talk," Arbuthnot said. "But even people who are never going to be able to work, disabled or elderly - why shouldn't there be an opportunity for them to have safe and decent housing?"

The filmmakers pointed out that even homeowners have subsidization through taxes and government

assistance, but it's not as apparent to others.

"It's the invisible versus the visible subsidization," Wilhelm said. "You don't hear about home ownership subsidies written up in the paper."

Wilhelm commented on prop-

erty values going up in certain areas of north and northeast Portland forcing low-income residents out of the neighborhood. With a new MAX light rail system, the restructuring of Mississippi Street and the

continued ▼ on page A7

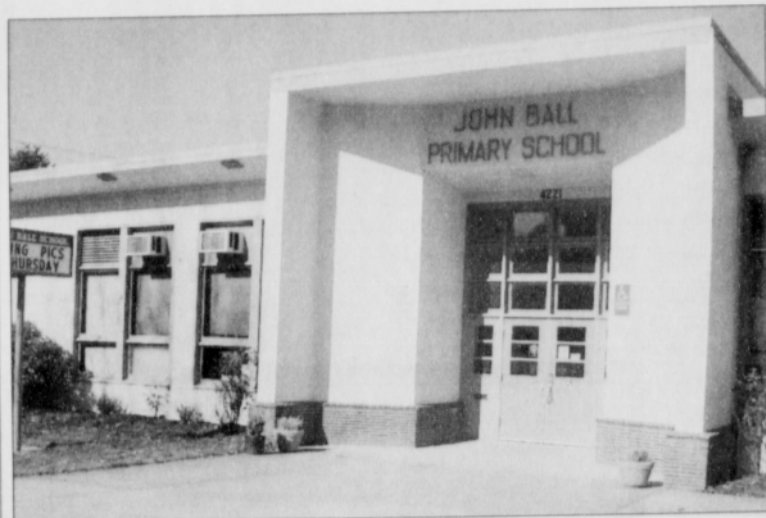


PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Seed money is being raised to replace the aging John Ball Elementary School with a new building that would serve an estimated 500 children moving into the New Columbia neighborhood.

Hopes Pinned on New Neighborhood School

With new families come more children, which means a revamped school will be in order for New Columbia.

Hopes are pinned on replacing the aging John Ball Elementary School with a new design for the 2006-07 school year, with the expectation of more than 500 elementary-school aged children moving into the neighborhood that once served the old Columbia Villa.

The Housing Authority of Portland made the decision last month, with its Board of Commissioners voting unanimously to donate \$100,000 toward the reconstruction. Portland Public Schools also voted

to match that amount.

Still, the project still needs \$10 million estimated for construction costs.

John Ball Elementary was built concurrently with Columbia Villa in 1948. It faces some of the same problems the old housing project had itself. With no gym and a dilapidated septic system, the school was listed in 2002 as a school district facility that needed to be replaced.

Community leaders see the future of the school in partnership with the city Bureau of Parks and Recreation and the Boys and Girls Club.



There's an easier way to get money from your home:
a Home Equity Loan from U.S. Bank.

Get money without any haggling.

The easiest way is a Home Equity Loan from U.S. Bank.

You can get loans up to 125% of your home's value.

With competitive rates, you'll enjoy an easy way to manage debt, build an addition, or even start a new business.

Plus, the interest on the loan may be tax-deductible.

It's all backed by our Five Star Service Guarantee.

No matter what your financial situation, we have the loan option for you.

Take advantage of this offer without the worry of closing costs, points, or fees.

And keep your worldly possessions.

5.99% APR
20-year fixed rate

Go online at usbank.com, visit a local branch, or call 1-888-444-BANK (2265) ext. 4100 for any other questions.

usbank
Five Star Service Guaranteed



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
When construction is complete, many low-income people will live in a brand new housing for the first time. New parks, community centers and other recreational facilities will also come to New Columbia.

*5.99% fixed APR available for terms up to 20 years on home equity loans with a U.S. Bank checking account with ACH and loan-to-value (LTV) of 80% or less. Higher rates apply for higher LTVs. Minimum loan amount or increase of \$10,000 required. Consult your tax advisor regarding deductibility of interest. On a \$10,000, 20-year loan at 5.99% APR, monthly payments would be \$71.59. Rates subject to change. Offer is subject to normal credit qualifications. Some additional restrictions may apply. Not available with other discounts. Home equity loans are offered through U.S. Bank National Association ND, Member FDIC.