

Multnomah County Combats Infant Deaths

Builds consortium to improve health

BY NICOLE HOOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A recent study by the Multnomah County Health Department found that low birth weight rate for African Americans is more than twice the rate of

whites. More shocking, the local infant mortality rate for African Americans was about 10 deaths per 1,000 births; compared to four deaths each 1,000 births for non-minority births.

For this reason, the Healthy Birth Initiative Consortium was founded to work with local mothers out of the Northeast Multnomah County Health Department on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

"I don't think there has been a specific program that target's African-Americans," said Ellie Myrick,

a case manager and county health department worker for the past eight years. She works along side community health nurse, Rose Pickett.

The two women help young mothers prevent SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) or what many refer to as crib death. Myrick believes that many people in the African-American community thought that the only way a child could die from SIDS was if the child slept in the crib. This myth is just part of the program to inform young African-American mothers about

the risks they face.

A group of local activists, public health officials, members of the faith community and parents is currently working with the consortium to reduce the unreasonably high rate of infant fatality among African Americans and Hispanics in Multnomah County. Through a federal grant that is renewed each year, the consortium has been able to help over 130 women in

continued ▼ on page A8

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Week in The Review

Iran Plans to Pursue Nuclear Tech Program

Iran declared Tuesday that it is determined to pursue all legal areas of nuclear technology, including uranium enrichment. Washington contends Iran's uranium enrichment program is aimed at building nuclear weapons. Enriched uranium also can be used to generate electricity, which Iran says is its only aim.

Runaway Bride Confesses

Authorities on Monday weighed the evidence to determine whether Jennifer Wilbanks should be charged with a crime. Wilbanks told authorities she was abducted, but later admitted she took a cross-country bus trip to avoid her lavish, 600-guest wedding, which was to have taken place Saturday.

Pakistan Building Collapses, 25 Killed

A gas explosion caused an apartment building to collapse in eastern Pakistan, killing at least 25 people and injuring 20 others as they slept early Tuesday, police and rescue officials said. Rescue workers were sifting through the rubble in a search for at least three others feared trapped inside the three-story building.

Childhood Obesity Plan

Former President Clinton announced Tuesday the launch of a 10-year initiative to combat childhood obesity, saying "we've got to change the eating habits of America's young people." Clinton said he became concerned in the subject after undergoing heart bypass surgery last year.

Fed Raises Interest Rates

The Federal Reserve raised short-term interest rates for the eighth time in 10 months Tuesday and suggested that more rate hikes are coming as central bankers keep their focus on stamping out inflation.

Hoping for a Second Chance

State holds future for middle school

BY KATHERINE KOVACICH
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Walking into Victory Middle School, a small charter school inside the Blazers Boys and Girls Club on Northeast Martin Luther King Boulevard, you'll find a setting for learning; no kids running around, no yelling teachers, no chaos.

Principal Cottrell B. White Jr. welcomes me with a handshake. He leads us to look in on classrooms through walls of glass. Youth are seated at small tables, their attention focused as an instructor diligently teaches them how to add numerators and denominators. There is no talking back to the teacher - just undivided attention for her.

When White introduces me to a young girl in the hallway, she shakes my hand lazily while looking off to the side. He points this out and calls her on it. The young student shakes my hand again. This time her grip is firm and she looks me in the eye, smiling.

Gregory Benton's computer class down the hall is filled with sixth graders working from a server that was built by the students. They're making web pages and writing letters on respect toward a teacher's assistant.

The environment of order and learning is quite a change from what one might have seen a year ago at Victory.

"There was no discipline here, everything was chaos. It's a 180-degree change," White said.

With a background as a student manage-



PHOTOS BY KATHERINE KOVACICH/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Students keep all eyes forward in Richard Blizzard's sixth grade class at Victory Middle School.



Victory Middle School Principal Cottrell B. White Jr.

ment specialist and dean of students that has spanned 30 years in the Portland Public School system, White brought order to the 65 students when he came on board last August.

"It's building something inside that the kids already have - they just need to use it.

Parents all want the same thing. They want them to be educated, respectful, to represent their family in a good manner. My whole approach to discipline is that it's on them. When they look in the mirror, who do they see?"

Victory is now facing an important vote on May 19 whether or not to renew the school's contract for the next school year. The Oregon Department of Education originally decided in 2003 to sponsor the school with public money that allows it to run free from traditional rules, only after Portland Public Schools turned down the request time after time.

Poor financial planning and record-keeping, a high turnover rate for teachers and little supervision on decisions made by the school's founder Rich Blizzard led state officials to recommend a halt on renewing the school.

But with so much improvement lately, it's hard to give those aspects much merit anymore.

The power of the school's board of directors has increased, a new board chairman has replaced Dan Lucero, and White has become principal over Blizzard, who now focuses on the school's self-paced material.

"We think that we have the cat's meow," White said. "We do self-paced learning. Having them go as fast as they want to go but not as slow as they want to go. We look at growth, not at grades."

The size of the multi-cultural school makes it easier to focus individually as well, with a ratio of 15 to one.

"We have teachers that care," White said. "They're not here because of the salary. They're here because they want to be here."

continued ▼ on page A7



PHOTO BY ISALAH BOUIE/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A MAX train makes a stop at north Lombard headed toward the City Center, marking one year since the opening of the 5.8 mile Yellow Line and 3.9 million passenger trips over the last year.

Yellow Line Celebrates First Year

Interstate Avenue sees 3.9 million rides

The Interstate MAX Yellow Line celebrated its first birthday Sunday, noting 3.9 million trips taken so far on its 5.8-mile line.

Ridership far outpaces the former bus line that operated on North Interstate Avenue, with weekday counts up 92 percent, Saturdays up 104 percent and Sundays up 97 percent.

The construction of light rail brought high-quality transit service, new sidewalks, traffic lanes, bike lanes, art and a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

"In addition to strong ridership, we've

seen tremendous excitement about the revitalized community that's a more attractive place to do business and live," said TriMet General Manager Fred Hansen.

When the Yellow Line opened, there was a 50 percent increase in the number of new businesses along the avenue, and that number continues to grow. Some of the big changes include a new Fred Meyer store, construction for a New Seasons Market and a \$27 million expansion underway at Kaiser Permanente.

Interstate MAX opened four months ahead of schedule and millions under budget, expanding the entire light rail system in the Portland area to 44 miles with 64 stations.

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