

If they're coming here, they're coming with nothing.

— Rev. Matt Hennessee on the local relief effort for victims of Hurricane Katrina and the flood of New Orleans

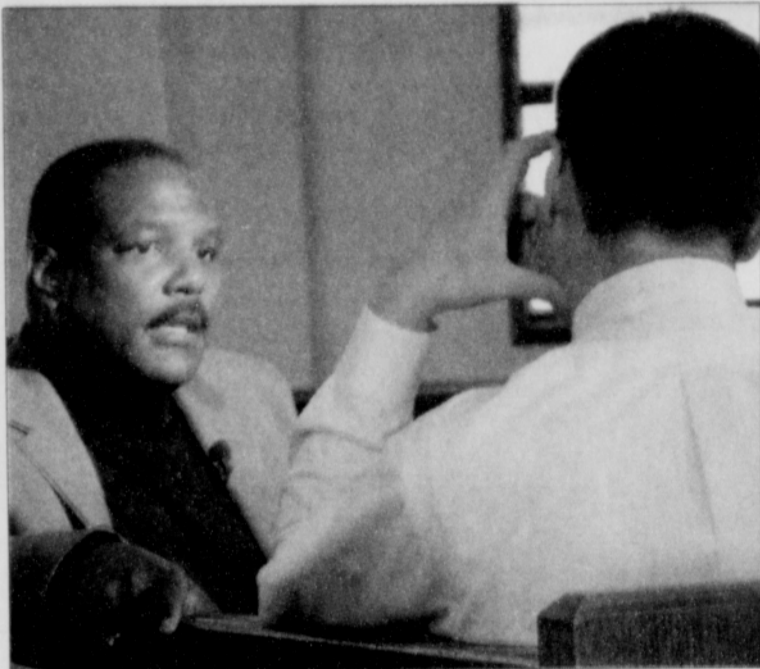


PHOTO BY ERIKA-LEIGH GOODWIN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Rev. Matt Hennessee, pastor of Vancouver Avenue Baptist Church, makes plans for a gospel concert and fundraising extravaganza to be held at the church on Friday at 7 p.m. to help victims of the hurricane and New Orleans flood being relocated to Portland.

Rallying Local Relief

continued ▲ from Front

elderly starving in the streets of New Orleans, dying in shelters, survivors still waiting for rescue and corpses being consumed by vermin in the streets drive Carter and other prominent members of Portland African American community to do more.

"It's interesting how we see that in Bangladesh and we recognize it's a third world country, we see that in the tsunami disaster and say again 'That's that region of the world,' but here we look at New Orleans and we have to scratch our heads and say 'This is really the United States of America?'" said Rev. Matt Hennessee, another Portland African-American leader. "Quite frankly our response to disasters elsewhere is a lot quicker and it's a lot bigger than it feels like the response was this time."

Friday, Carter teamed up with Hennessee to engineer a plan for local relief. Also in attendance was Peggy C. Ross of the Governor's Office and Amber Ontiveros from TriMet.

The meeting evolved to a rallying effort where more than 25 local pastors, were phoned with hopes of organizing an event this week.

By Sunday afternoon the steering committee doubled in numbers and willingness to help. Representatives from the state and county as well as community members wanted to play an important part in the revitalization of the hurricane survivors' lives.

The committee is working to arrange a welcome reception for victims moved to Portland as well as various forms of assistance to help them retain some sense of normalcy after living through this catastrophic event.

As a result on Friday, Sept. 9 at 7 p.m., Rev. Hennessee and his Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church, located at 3138 N. Vancouver Ave., will play host to a gospel extravaganza.

The Amazing Grace Relief Concert will benefit Hurricane Katrina survivors who are being relocated to Portland by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Choirs and ministers from all over Portland will sing and preach their hearts out with hopes of making the survivor who will call Portland their shelter feel more like they are at home.

Attendees are encouraged to bring donations of money, non-perishable food and clothing.

Most of the displaced Americans in Portland will find temporary housing at the former Washington High School in southeast Portland.

"If they're coming here, they're coming with nothing," said Hennessee. "We're just concerned citizens who want to see something happen; to be of support in a time like this."

The gospel show will be the first of many fund raising and outreach efforts by the group. There are also sub-committees working on providing health care, education assistance and faith ministries.

"This is not a Christmas activ-

Parallels to New Orleans Tragedy

continued ▲ from Front

hood, and what they called home. "My mother lost everything," Washington said. It took the family two years to finally get back onto stable ground, living-wise.

Still, seeing coverage of those tragically affected by the flood of New Orleans, Washington noted that at least "in Vanport, once we got onto Interstate Avenue and were dry, we had water and homes to stay in. We got out safely, we knew where we all together."

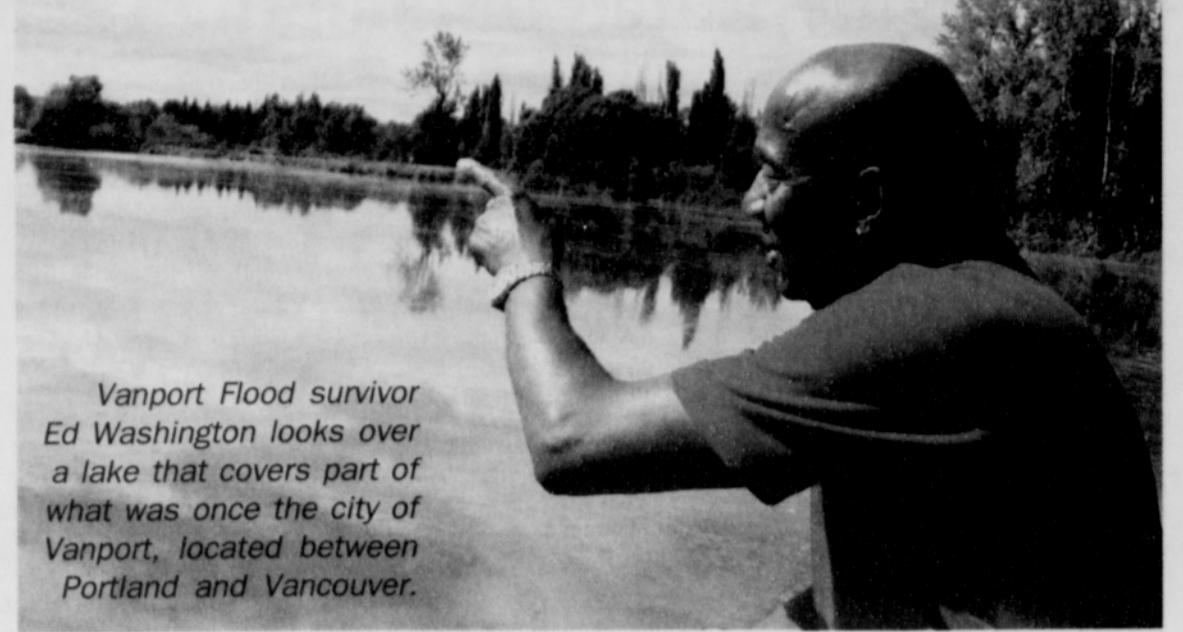
His empathy is immense for those suffering in the South.

"We lost our housing like those people in New Orleans. Most of the housing was completely lifted up off the foundation. You didn't have time to get anything out - your family pictures, your books. You just have to get out to save your life," Washington said. "I've been struck by the loss of everything and that slow step of putting their lives back together. That's a lot of people to be housed when the housing isn't there."

Washington can also relate with the children affected by the flood, saying, "As a 12-year-old kid, having to get on a bus to some unknown place and having to go to a gym to sleep on cots and eating food that's not your mom's food - you're gracious for what you get."

He said it's important that the rest of the nation supports those affected, regardless of whether or not they know anyone directly hit.

"I like to believe that the others of us in this country who are not experiencing this will open their hearts and will open their



Vanport Flood survivor Ed Washington looks over a lake that covers part of what was once the city of Vanport, located between Portland and Vancouver.

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

purses to help. They're not in it by themselves," Washington said.

Concerning the government's lack of planning before the onslaught of the hurricane, Washington said, "It's an unbelievable recipe for disaster."

But, he added, it's difficult to

hashing of what should've been done and what should've been done," Washington said.

If nothing else, this is an event to learn from.

"I think that every city in this country ought to be thinking about the possibility of what to do if it

Once the hurricane starts blowing, that's going to run its course. It's how do you deal with the aftermath. I'm not certain that any city in this country is prepared. We have to look beyond the disaster, what do we do with people in hospitals. I would hope that our whole approach would be a bit more comprehensive."

Washington said people are not just losing their houses and material goods, they're losing loved ones, their sense of well-being and for some, their will to survive.

"You can always get new clothes. You can't get a new mom or dad or brother or sister

or wife or friend. We lost all of our clothes but we had our lives and our families. There's no comparison," Washington said. "The only thing any of us can have is to try to the best of your ability to hold on. Just don't give up."



Families, homes and even cars were covered by water from the Columbia River on May 30, 1948, shown in this historical photo from the Vanport Flood. OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY PHOTO

foresee the results of a natural catastrophe.

"I'm sure that their thought process was predicated on past situations. I'm sure they're doing the best they can under the circumstances. There will be lots of re-

really hits," Washington said. "Does Portland really have a place for a major earthquake? We probably have some plans in terms of bridges, but do we really have a plan in where we take people, where do we take them out of the city.

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