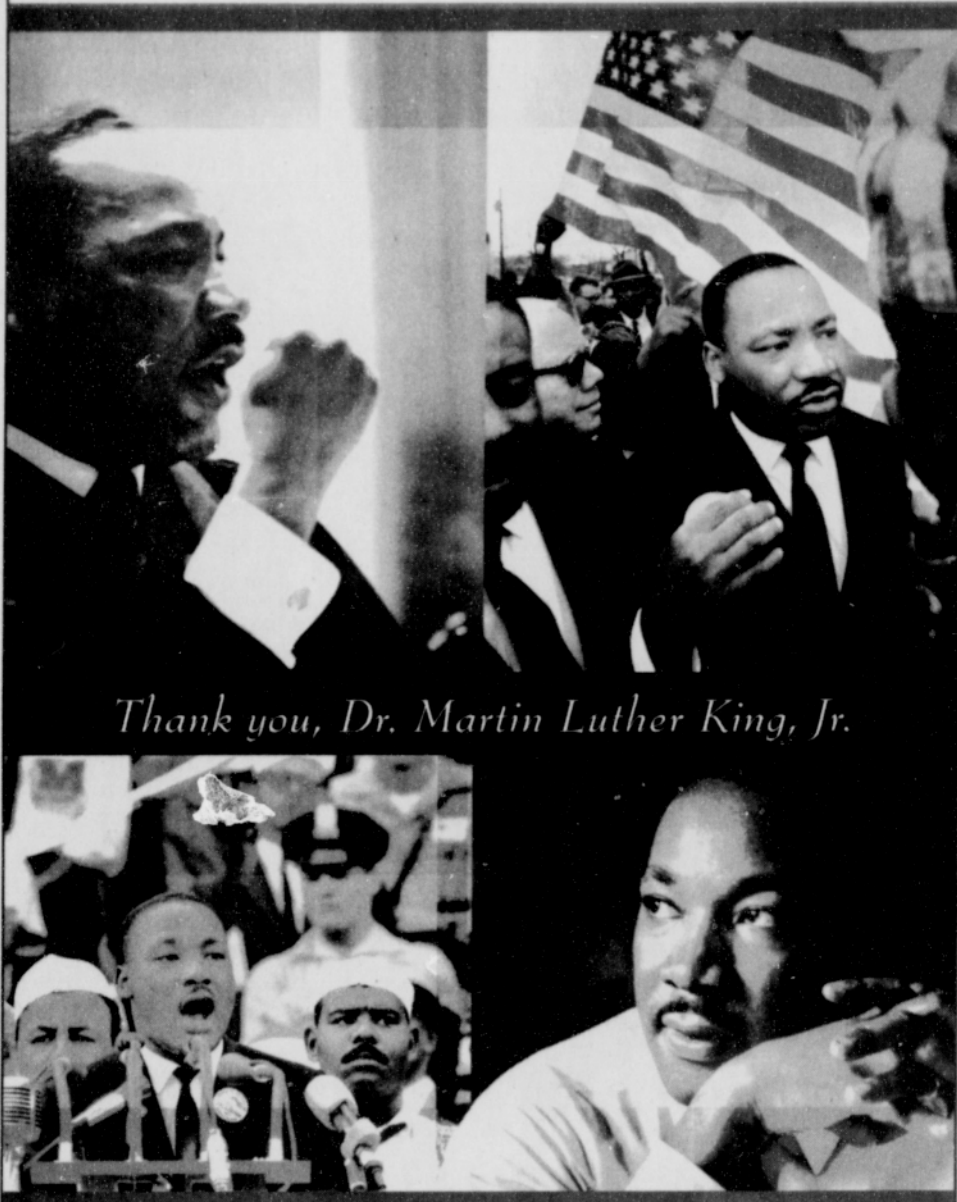


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Activist follows King's dream to end homelessness



Sisters of the Road Café Director Genny Nelson (right) and Jimmy Brown, a longtime department manager in the city of Portland.

BY LEE PERLMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Like Martin Luther King Jr., Genny Nelson has a dream: To end homelessness. It is a dream she feels can be achieved.

Nelson is a champion of people outside America's comfortable mainstream — in her case, the homeless of Portland.

As founder of Sisters of the Road Café and its director for most of its 29 years of existence, Nelson is perhaps the city's most experienced, respected and effective homeless advocate.

She was an early recipient of

the Mayor's Spirit of Portland Award, an annual recognition of work for community betterment. A month ago she received a National Caring Award from the National Caring Institute in Washington, D.C. Inspired by the example of Mother Teresa, the award is given to people who are "a visual manifestation that one person can make a difference."

At a City Hall ceremony to mark the occasion, Portland mayor Tom Potter said Nelson has been "very effective" as an advocate while remaining "the kindest, most caring person I've

everknown." In the case of homelessness, Nelson said, "Building relationships with people is paramount. You can't just throw money at the problem. We've institutionalized the problem — it's accepted, and there's no attempt to deal with the underlying issues."

She noted that in Portland, "One of the largest barriers to having a home is that rents here have skyrocketed." To combat this, she'd like to see a "permanent housing subsidy" to make more housing affordable for the poorest people. She said this should be coupled with the work of another agency called JOIN.

"They build a relationship with individual landlords and get them to take in homeless people. If the person screws up and trashes the apartment, the landlord knows that JOIN will make good the damages."

Another issue, she said, is that it's no longer possible to live independently on a minimum wage job.

"You could raise the minimum wage to a livable level, maybe \$13 an hour," she said.

Nelson said efforts to build

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Life Before and After the Boycott

Rosa Parks was educated at the Montgomery Industrial School for Girls in the 1920s. The school closed when Parks was in eighth grade. She then attended the Laboratory School at Alabama State Teachers College for Negroes, eventually dropping out to care for her ailing mother. She later received her high school diploma. In 1932, at 20 years old, she married a barber, Raymond Parks, a charter member of the Montgomery Chapter of the NAACP.

During World War II, Parks worked at Maxwell Field (now Maxwell Air Force Base) in Montgomery, Ala. At the time of her arrest for refusing to sit at the back of bus segregated by race and the ensuing bus boycott, Parks was employed as a seamstress at the Montgomery Fair department store. Due to

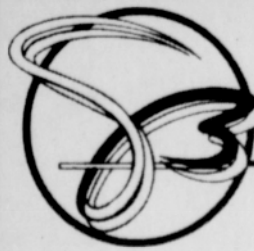


Rosa Parks working as a seamstress in Montgomery, Ala. in the mid 1950s.

her notoriety after the boycott, she and her husband were unable to find work. In 1957 they moved to Detroit, Mich. where she remained active in the civil rights movement.

In 1965, Parks began working for the campaign of John Conyers prior to his entry into the U.S House of Representatives. She continued to work for Conyers until she retired in 1988.

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Montgomery Improvement Association

Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. presides over a meeting of the Montgomery Improvement Association in 1955, a Montgomery, Ala. group founded just days after Rosa Parks' arrest for refusing to comply with the city's race segregation laws. The group organized bus boycott strategies and kept efforts at a local level to attract little opposition. Members also included Parks (center) and Rev. Ralph Abernathy (seated left).