

Promoting Equal Justice for 61 Years

continued ▲ from Front

ficer Vanessa Gaston left her position at the Washington State Department of Veteran Affairs to direct the Portland league. She introduced a strategic plan to push the league into a promising new direction.

Today, the organization has dodged the non-profit kiss of death by streamlining its organization and focus. The revitalized chapter has pared down its staff to 17, with the same number serving on the board. A shorter list of programs emphasize quality services designed to promote a single, priority focus: closing the educational achievement gap.

The sweeping changes were the result of a rule Gaston learned in the military: use your resources wisely.

"The military taught me how to work in diverse environments and focus on what the ultimate mission is," Gaston said.

Adopting a single focus allowed the league to use limited resources to connect education with their developing employment programs. They made a decision to move away from health and environmental issues and traditional employment programs because other non-profits focus on those areas.

Current services include NULITES, the National Urban League's Incentives to Excel and Succeed program. This year they're working with Roosevelt High School freshman. They are redeveloping their employment program, which includes an existing annual Career Connections Job Fair.

Other programs include community outreach and advocacy, and a multi-cultural senior center. The League also helps low-income individuals by renting out 24 studio and one-bedroom apartments above their north Portland offices.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OREGON HISTORIC SOCIETY
Edwin "Bill" Berry was named the first director of the Urban League of Portland in 1945.

Black History Month: Yes or No? Observance draws debate

BY SARAH BLOUNT
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Oscar-winning actor Morgan Freeman perpetuated a debate when he recently suggested that the observance of Black History Month was ridiculous because it regulated black history to a month.

Freeman said black history is American history and that the only way to end racism was to stop talking about it.

The month was originally Negro History Week, designated in 1926 by African American educator Carter G. Woodson's to commemorate the mid-February birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

Woodson himself said he hoped the week would one day be American history.

But, 70 Februaries later, the two don't seem near a harmonious merger.



Vanessa Gaston



Morgan Freeman

Vanessa Gaston, chief executive officer of the Portland Urban League, replied to Freeman's statements with a mirror-opposite opinion.

"We created Black History Month because we were not learning about our accomplishments," she said. "Having the month is the right thing to do, until we become equal."

Gaston said Freeman, personally experienced the first wave of the modern Civil Rights movement, but believes the younger generations of black Americans are culturally disconnected from the anti-discrimination movement.

They haven't had the same experience with poverty and racism, she said.

"What we need to do is bridge that gap, and move the younger generation into that movement."

Gaston said in an equal world, Freeman's comments would have made sense.

School Tax Supported Mayor's funding proposal to go to voters

Mayor Tom Potter unveiled a new funding plan to save Portland schools on Thursday in front of an enthusiastic crowd of parents, educators, business and community leaders.

The 5 p.m. rally at Benson High School in northeast Portland was the kick-off to the campaign for a proposed citywide income tax that will be on the May ballot. The new funding stream would be used to keep Portland's five school districts afloat after the Oregon Leg-

islature again failed to fund the state's schools adequately.

"Portland isn't turning its back on Portland's children," the mayor told an enthusiastic crowd. "Tonight, we begin to keep our promise to our children to give them the kind of quality education they deserve - and they will need in order to have the future we want for them."

Mayor Potter's plan calls for a Portland-only income tax that would last 4 years - or end as soon as the Legislature adequately addresses

the state's education needs. It would end the double taxation imposed on Portland's small businesses by the Multnomah County I-Tax.

All of the funds collected would stay in Portland; voters in David Douglas, Centennial, Reynolds and Parkrose districts will receive approximately \$1.30 for every \$1 in taxes paid, while those in the Portland Public School district would keep 95 cents of every tax dollar paid.



PHOTO BY ISAIAH BOUIE/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
School advocates gather at Benson High School in northeast Portland Thursday to cheer Mayor Tom Potter's proposal to financially support of local schools with a new temporary income tax.

Reed College celebrates Black History Month 2006



bell hooks
Lecture: "Talking Intersections: Class, Race, Gender, Nationality, and Religion"

7 P.M. | THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2
TICKETS ARE NO LONGER AVAILABLE.

Feminist, social thinker, intellectual and author hooks reflects on complex issues of our time.



Michael Eric Dyson
Lecture: "Come Hell or High Water"

7 P.M. | FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17
TICKETS ARE NO LONGER AVAILABLE.

From his forthcoming book, Dyson speaks on what Hurricane Katrina revealed about race and poverty in America.



"The Incredible Journey of Jazz"
Concert and Lecture

2 P.M. | MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20 | KAUL AUDITORIUM
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Co-sponsored by the Portland Jazz Festival, this program presents the story of jazz for middle-school children and their parents.



Ethnic Heritage Ensemble
Concert

7 P.M. | TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28 | ELIOT HALL CHAPEL
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

This group of acclaimed, rule-bending musicians fuses traditional and popular African music in this avant garde performance.

For more information, visit web.reed.edu/black_history_month/ or call the Reed events line at 503/777-7755.

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