

# The Portland Observer 2007

## MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. A New Generation of Leaders

January 10, 2007

### Bringing It All Back Home

Choosing to be part of Portland's young black leadership

BY SARAH BLOUNT  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

When I met Cyreena Boston, I asked her the same question this young African American leader in Portland is asked every day.

Why did Boston leave Atlanta, known as the "D.C. of the South" to return to Portland, where the black community and black leadership are only a fraction of the southern capital's.

Boston, a Portland native, spent seven years in Atlanta, studying history and Arabic immersion at Spelman College, a private, historically black women's university in the heart of the city. After school she was poised to launch a career.

"It was 100 percent amazing on an academic, social and cultural level," Boston said. "But it was a very cocooned experience."

Atlanta is honored as the birth of the modern Civil Rights Movement, a place where Boston excelled among the upper echelon of African American society.

But among the elite she found it hard to ignore the enormous disparity between rich and poor. She decided to

leave Spelman during her junior year in favor of hands-on public service work in drug abuse and child prostitution. Eventually, she launched her own public affairs television show, "Talk To Me Atlanta".

During her final year in Atlanta, Boston returned to school to graduate with a degree in American and European History.

It was then she made the decision to leave the South, but not for Washington D.C., like her family and peers expected. Instead, Boston found her way back home in Portland, taking a job at the Blazers Boys and Girls Club. Now settled, she works as constituency director for the Democratic Party of Oregon.

Boston's parents are supportive, but she believes their opinion is that she could have had her pick of careers in D.C.

So back to the question Boston finds a little annoying - why Portland? She explains:

"I got the seven-year itch and I knew I couldn't be objective anymore," she said. "There was no challenge. I knew as a black woman Oregon deserved my



PHOTO BY SEAN O'CONNOR/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Cyreena Boston is one of many young African Americans from Portland who were whisked away to bigger and more diverse cities. It's tough losing them, but sometimes, as in Boston's case, they come back with a fresh perspective.

perspective."

Boston has chosen to make Portland her home again, but she won't tiptoe around criticism of the city and its black leadership. She believes leaders of the

1960s through the 1980s fought hard to blaze a way, but...

"I'm not into hero worship. In my parents' generation a lot of 'first timers' were the first woman, black per-

son, and Hispanic to have positions in Multnomah County and Salem. With that comes a lot of pressure, and keep-

continued on page B3

### Finding Common Ground in Justice

Activist follows Dr. King's message to unify human struggles

BY SARAH BLOUNT  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Kathleen Saadat has a mantra: bigotry is bigotry.

The activist for African American, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights now serves as director of diversity and human resources at Cascade AIDS Project, Oregon's leading HIV/AIDS advocacy and education organization.

But since moving to Portland from St. Louis 36 years ago, Saadat has never limited her life's work to race, gender or class. Her devotion to human rights follows the path of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said we must not allow ourselves to be managed by hatred or terror.

"I have my own need to feel liberated, and I extend that need," she said.

Going back to her mantra, Saadat finds that bigotry threatens to separate Americans, as we splinter off into groups to fight our own causes.

"We talk about freedom and justice for all - and then say 'not them', and we

need to get over that," Saadat said. "Civil rights and justice are not divisible along the lines of gender, sexual orientation and age."

During her many years of experience, a shining moment of Saadat's advocacy occurred in the early 1990s, when conservative supporters of Measure 9 waged war with their anti-gay ballot initiative.

Measure 9 failed in 1992, but the true victory was when African Americans and the LGBT community joined in the fight together.

"We're confused about what civil rights means," she said, "we think it only has to do with race."

Saadat cites Huey P. Newton, co-founder and leader of the 1960s Black Panther Party.

In his book of writings "To Die For the People", edited by Toni Morrison, Newton expressed the need for the black community to reach out to the gay and lesbian community.

"Why don't we know about this," Saadat said. "Because we are scared to



Kathleen Saadat is a 65-year-old African American lesbian activist who has supported a rainbow of human rights causes for more than 30 years.

*"We're confused about what civil rights means... we think it only has to do with race."*

- Kathleen Saadat, Portland activist

take hold of it, but Dr. King taught us it was ok."

Saadat's role at Cascade AIDS Project is to unite rather than divide civil liberties.

"I want this agency and staff to be comfortable in the midst of people from other countries and cultures."

CAP was founded in 1983, at a time when Americans were told HIV/AIDS

was a gay white man's disease.

Over the past two decades we've learned that silence and racial disparities have caused a disproportionate number of African Americans to contract HIV.

"Black gay men kept raising the issue and over time CAP started paying attention," Saadat said.

Her role at CAP is to culturally expand HIV/AIDS awareness and edu-

cation by reaching out to minority populations. Saadat initially came to CAP in 2005, when former executive director Thomas Bruner hired her as manager of the Communities of Color initiative.

With full support of the board and staff, current director Jean Ann Van Krevelen created the position of diver-

sity and human resources director this past August. She said it was a natural fit for the two roles to be combined.

"Kathleen was promoted because of her experience in both areas," Van Krevelen said. "She is an intelligent, thoughtful, committed and compassionate person who is dedicated to serving

continued on page B4

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**Judge Sees Inequality at an Early age**  
Judge Adrienne Nelson  
See page B11

**Local Leader Committed to King's Dream**  
Pursuing economic justice for all  
See page B15

**Black in America**  
Charlene McGee  
See page B7