Historic Church Destroyed in Fire

worship. Steeped in history, Senior Pastor Rev. Albert Wayne Johnson said the church was built around 1890 or 1891 by German Lutherans. The seeds of the current congregation were planted in the spring of 1947 at North Vancouver Avenue and Knott Street.

The ministry relocated several times before settling into its final home in 1959. The three-story building takes up half a city block and has housed several outreach services in its annex, including an alternative school for inner-city youth, a soup kitchen and a center for teen parents.

Community member and gang outreach city staffer John Canda was one of several to offer his condolences to Johnson, who was called to pastor the church beginning in 1992. Canda had spoken with Johnson shortly after the fire.

"He was visibly shaken but he is a solid man," Canda said. "I have no doubt they will rebuild."

Church member Jeaneen Montgomery arrived at the scene Tuesday morning with her daughter, Precious Lott. Montgomery had raised Lott at Morning Star, where she sang in the choir and was a member of the church's drill team.

"I was baptized at this church," Lott said as she surveyed the gutted building. "I was here when Ken Griffey Jr. built our playground in the backyard."

Across the street, Alberta Phillips, 77, quietly observed Morning Star from her resting spot. Phillips sat reticent as curious neighbors, church members and supporters milled about among boxes of pizza and pastries, while on the other side of police tape firefighters and investigators continued their work.

"It's hard to look at," she said, "but we know when something is

built it doesn't mean it will always be there."

Phillips is one of the original members of the congregation, having joined in 1955 when Morning

Star was located on North Fargo.

Like many others, Phillips was in shock, but recalled memories of running the alternative education program at the church for a

dozen years.

From her perspective, the church's charred shell stood among piles of rubble and remains, but beyond the ruin lies a

fenced-in grassy area that was left undamaged.

"We're going to have church there on Sunday," Phillips said. "In the yard."

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church parishioners Jeaneen Montgomery and her daughter Precious Lott survey the damage of their beloved church Tuesday morning after a massive fire destroyed the northeast Portland landmark.

The Oregon Symphony's JaTtik Clark instructs students as part of the symphony's community music partnership.

Symphony Musicians Love Making Music

Tango Berretin.

"Music is a terrific calling," said Clark. "You are only limited by your imagination."

Jennifer Arnold has been making music as a member of the symphony's viola section for the past year.

"I'm surrounded by the best players," she said with a smile. "It's incredible."

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Arnold was raised by parents who were school principals and who also played music instruments.

"I didn't have much of a choice in the matter," she recalled. "I had to study music, but I really loved it."

Arnold started with violin lessons at the age of five and practiced three hours a day. She first tried the viola when she 12, because she played with an

ensemble that didn't have enough violists.

She earned her undergraduate and graduate degrees from the Cleveland Institute of Music.

"It's the best school for strings in the nation," she said. "You get to study with members of the Cleveland Orchestra. All of the students in my class have professional performing jobs – every one of them."

Before coming to Portland, Arnold was a member of the Youth Orchestra of the Americas and has traveled three times with that ensemble to South America.
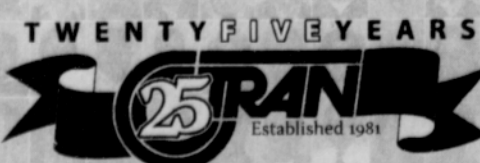
"I really loved my experience in South America," she said. "One tour lasted for eight weeks, and we played in 18 cities. Every concert was sold out. We also had some terrific jam sessions at receptions after the concerts. People started dancing and that's really cool!"