

East County Flash Point

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the pressure, a Gresham task force has recommended a five-year tax that would increase the city's police budget by between \$3 million and \$6 million annually, adding up to 54 more law enforcement positions. If approved by the City Council, the proposal would go to voters in November 2008.

Gresham has one of the lowest per-capita rates of police officers in Oregon, and the mayor's task force cited the need for more help in patrols, youth-crime prevention and investigations.

In the meantime, Gresham Police will have to do their best with what they have and with additional help for Portland Police.

"Law enforcement has learned we cannot isolate us, each of us, to our own boundaries and our own borders because the bad guys don't

respect that," says Piluso. "You don't stop and say, 'Ohmigawd, I'm not crossing 162nd.'"

She stood in front of television news cameras last month with other officials at the corner's Max light-rail stop to outline immediate crime-prevention measures being taken. As Gresham's first woman police chief, she also recognizes the continued necessity of recruiting more people of color and women to be officers.

"That has been a priority of this department forever, recognizing that the ideal formula is that your police department mirrors your community," Piluso says. "We continue to strive towards that goal; are we where I'd like us to be? No."

As Gresham resident Sarah Edmond rode Max toward Portland, she verified a disconnect in the eyes of African Americans, who have become a much larger proportion of the city's population with



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Chuck Matthews visits his sister near East Burnside and 162nd Avenue. But Matthews says she's moving out because she doesn't feel safe.

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little representation in positions of power.

Edmond moved to Gresham from Louisiana two years ago and says she still feels safer there than in Portland's downtown. However, she sees the larger city as more friendly to minorities, saying, "If I wanted to be a police officer, I'd go to Portland because it's more diverse."

With all the other government departments competing for the same small pool of minority candidates, Piluso explains that recruiting officers of color has been difficult. She hopes that more minority officers will soon help pinpoint the source of all the gang-related activity, saying, "As we have identified gangsters, there are areas and pockets, some associated with housing, some associated with transit and some that we just can't find a connector to."

Piluso, a 28-year-veteran of police work who is running for a seat on the Multnomah County Com-

mission next year, says there's a need to strengthen the human side of government services.

"Social-service needs don't stop at city borders," she says. "Especially with the advent of technology, our cities all have city-limit signs, but our work doesn't end there."

Saying that "we have to get back" to the Portland-area sense of community that she experienced growing up in the '50s and '60s, Piluso, 62, advocates that people get to know their neighbors to prevent crime and to give some encouragement for breaking professional boundaries.

"Being the age I am now, you like to think that you open the door a little bit for others, and when my peers are people like (Sen.) Margaret Carter (an African-American lawmaker from Portland) who are opening a different set of doors depending on what career path we chose, it's really exciting."

Equal Opportunity Focus

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sponsorship opportunities, call the Urban League of Portland at 503-280-2626 or visit www.ulpdx.org.

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