

# Former Convicts Look Beyond Barriers

continued ▲ from Front

Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco. Governments nationwide have developed laws and resolutions to encourage private companies to reduce their barriers to hiring qualified people with felony convictions, in what a New York Times editorial called "a step forward in terms of fairness for law-abiding ex-offenders."

In other steps for this population, thousands in Oregon have expunged minor criminal convictions to gain drivers-license privileges, employment and housing, thanks to Roy Jay and the African American Chamber of Commerce. The groundbreaking Project Clean Slate gained basic financial stability during the past legislative session, but Jay and Katz have argued that the fight for non-discriminatory criminal justice continues against the ravages of mandatory-minimum sentencing.

Over the next two years, Oregon will spend \$1.3 billion on a correctional system that houses African Americans at a proportion more than five times that of Caucasians. Two percent of Oregon's population, African Americans make up almost 10 percent or 1,293 out of the 13,488 in the state's prisons, according to the past month's Oregon Department of Corrections count.

"We need to give judges back to job of judging," Katz says. "I just want everybody to have a fair chance."



PHOTO BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Paula Drake (left) and Patty Katz are spearheading a campaign to open up employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

# Fewer Oregon Families Earn Living Wage

continued ▲ from Front

Investigators have found that skyrocketing health-care costs present the greatest barrier to living wage jobs in Oregon. The successful initiative in 2002 to tie the state's minimum wage to inflation, raising 15 cents Jan. 1 to \$7.95 an hour, has almost no impact for health-care needs.

"We worked really hard on the minimum-wage increases, but that's only the start of our work," Geri Washington, an organizer for Oregon Action, told the Portland Observer.

"As industries start to create jobs, we're looking to make sure that these jobs have living wages."

Washington demands particular attention for "people of color disproportionately living under terrible conditions."

"It's time for decision makers to create race-based policies to help people of color, thereby affecting everyone positively," Washington says. "Then and only then can we lift the barriers to unionization and to the other ways that people can lift themselves out of poverty."

## Forum to Promote Living Wages

State Rep. Chip Shields, State Sen. Margaret Carter, both of north and northeast Portland, are inviting the community to a Town Hall forum to map out an agenda for bringing living-wage jobs to local residents.

The meeting will be Wednesday, Jan. 9 from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. at the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs (OAME), 4134 N. Vancouver Ave. Special guests will include Dan Gardner, Oregon Labor Commissioner; Connie Ashbrook, Executive Director of Oregon Tradeswomen Inc.; and Roy Jay, President of the African-

American Chamber of Commerce.

Shields cites his past role in developing living-wage jobs by steering \$20 million in government assistance to jumpstart street-car manufacturing in the Portland area, making it easier to form a union, and funding a union apprenticeship pilot program at Benson High School.

Shields also mentions legislative work for a minority-business agenda and helping people in recovery from addiction get their lives back on track through the African-American Chamber's Project Clean Slate.

## Community Calendar

### Marvelous Bats

Sunday, Jan. 6 through Tuesday, Jan. 8, children ages 3-5 will have the opportunity to learn the truth about the grinning bats at the Oregon Zoo; for more information visit [oregonzoo.org](http://oregonzoo.org) or call 503-220-2781.

### Guitar Zero to Guitar Hero

Beginning Wednesday, Jan. 9, Mt. Hood Community College will offer guitar classes for beginners; classes will be held at Walt Morey Middle School, 2801 SW Lucas in Troutdale. The fee is \$59. For registration information, call 503-491-7572.

### YWCA Clark County Volunteers

Do you want to make a difference in your community, become a volunteer? Caring individuals are encouraged to attend an 'Introduction to Volunteer Services' to be held at the YWCA, 3609 Main St. in Vancouver on Tuesday, Jan. 15, from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Call 360-696-0167 to see how you can help.

### Penguins, Penguins, Penguins

Saturday, Jan. 5, from 10 a.m. to noon, children ages 5-7 will learn all about these unusual birds at the Oregon Zoo with adult accompaniment; to learn more visit [oregonzoo.org](http://oregonzoo.org) or call 503-220-2781.

### Fix-It Fair

Saturday, Jan. 12, from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., Lents School, 5105 S.E. 97th Ave., will host a free city of Portland sponsored fix it fair, providing information about topics such as: gardening, home health and safety and energy conservation. Free childcare on site. For more information, visit [portlandonline.com/osd](http://portlandonline.com/osd) or call 503-823-4309.

### Wonders of the Winter Sky

Monday, Jan. 14, at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m., the Mt. Hood Community College Planetarium Sky Theater, located under the Gresham campus library, Director Doug McCarty host the fascinating look at our beautiful winter night's sky; admission is \$1, seating is limited.

### Advocates Needed

Volunteer advocates and investigators are needed to serve as ombudsmen for residents of nursing homes, residential care facilities, assisted-living and adult foster-care homes; training and certification begins Thursday, Jan. 10. For more information on how you can get involved contact Kathy Walter at 800-522-2602.

**Oregon's first biofuel station.  
Made possible by Lottery funds.**

More and more Oregonians are choosing biodiesel, bioethanol and other bio-blended fuels for their cars and trucks. So the people at SeQuential Biofuels had an idea. They wanted to build the country's first all-biofuel filling station on a site in South Eugene. Thanks to funding help from the Oregon Lottery, their idea became reality. Today, the station is a showplace for clean, renewable, domestically-produced energy—not just for Oregon, but for all of America. To find out more, visit [ItDoesGoodThings.org](http://ItDoesGoodThings.org).

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