

Focus on Human Rights Welcomed

Commission returns after absence

BY RAYMOND RENDELMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Portland City Council's approval of a Human Rights Commission and a Children's Bill of Rights revitalizes a political framework for addressing basic social issues.

The goal is to offer underrepresented populations a voice in government policies to end disparities, racial tensions and barriers to community needs.

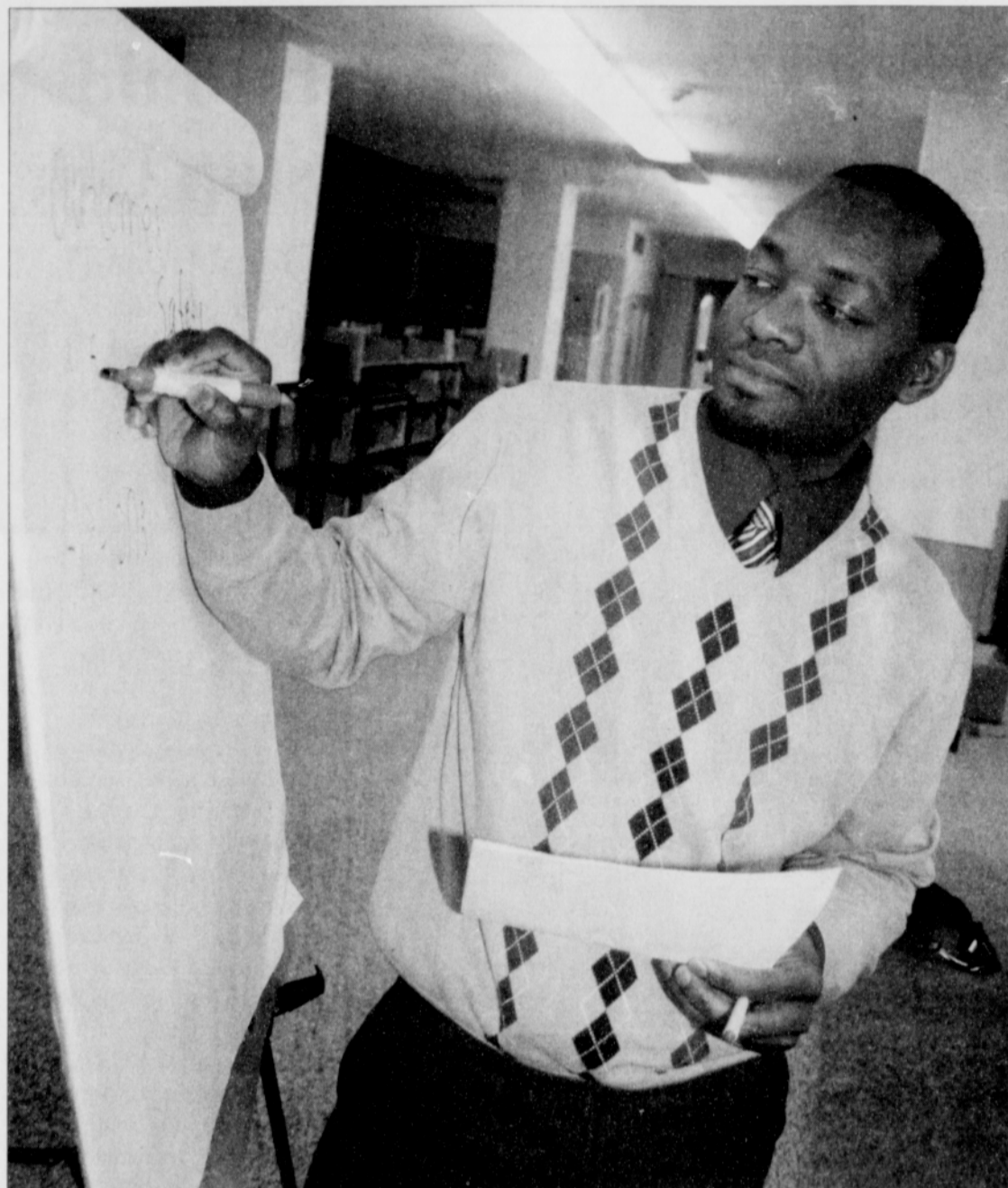
Advocates have identified some recent controversies might have benefited from the commission, including the ruling that delayed Oregon's domestic partnership law, the fight over renaming Interstate Avenue and the efforts of police racial-profiling committees.

For complicated issues such as these, the rights commission could strive to make a difference by presenting the facts in a neutral setting.

Tiffani Penson, Bureau of Development outreach coordinator, and Katie Perkins, mentoring coordinator for Portland Impact, joined in a recent discussion about the consequences of hate speech and the ways that it could be controlled.

For Penson, passionate conversations will translate into real strides in education and employment.

"It's a good role for the government to take," she says. "My main goal is, by me being on the front line, listening, seeing what the issues are, I want to come up with ways that the bureau can address and be a part of the solution to as



PHOTOS BY RAYMOND RENDELMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Jefferson High School mentor Daniel Capuia works on the local children's bill of rights at a recent community meeting.

many of those issues as possible."

Seeing human rights as especially important for people of diverse backgrounds, Penson argues that people in her black community

will appreciate any improved means for redressing grievances.

"We walked a long, hard road so that those rights would be acknowledged," she says. "Without hu-

man rights, you can't possibly feel equal or successful, you just feel stifled."

Being one generation removed from migrant workers, the Human

Rights Commission's top advocate, Carmen Caballero Rubio, defines her efforts in the mayor's office broadly to include any underserved population.

Rubio appreciates increasing numbers of immigrants' hard work going unrecognized as a symbol for greater social problems. She sees opportunities for creativity where other parts of government have left populations and issues behind.

"We need someone who's going to be on watch to tie everything together, see if there are some patterns and maybe recommend some direct action to correct (problems)," Rubio says.

Meeting with local residents over the past year, city officials heard many calls to bring back the Human Rights Commission, a panel that was dissolved in 2003 after 55 years

of advocacy, beginning in 1948 with the United Nation's declaration of universal human rights.

Lew Fredrick, a consultant for the city and community leader, said Portland Human Rights Commission will need patience.

"There's a lot to take on," he says, citing the possibilities for advocacy, research, education and intervention.

Daniel Capuia, a Portland State University student who recently received a grant through the non-profit Innovation Partnership to coordinate mentors at Jefferson High School, was grateful to the commitment of the mayor and his staff to reviving the commission.

Both men hoped that future city leaders will stay committed.

"It can't be something that just takes place for this particular administration," Fredrick says.



Carmen Caballero Rubio defines her efforts in the mayor's office broadly to include any underserved population.

Race in the Media

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about the case will generate lively questions from the audience.

"Race in the media is an important issue anywhere, but we really felt like with the Foxworth case there was a lot not said," Johnson told the Portland Observer.

Johnson and graduate student Roberta Hunte completed a 22-page study of the case, focusing on the different tactics utilized by Portland's black-owned press versus the dominant white-owned media.

"The Skanner and the Observer told a more complex story consistently, where the mainstream papers focused primarily on the sex of the thing," Johnson says.

As some newspapers printed the claims in their entirety, the minority news outlets focused on the merits of the case or what Johnson and Hunte call the difference between "constructive and destructive storytelling."

If more news outlets had treated the story with such consideration, Johnson argues, "The public would have access to a larger, more complex story, and thus may not fall into the ways that we traditionally think about race."

He said the police department itself has a role in creating a silent environment surrounding racial issues, but the responsibility for

the perpetuation of stereotypes rests primarily on media outlets that tend to bury the real story.

"It is interesting in a city where officers who are found guilty of using unreasonable force still maintain their jobs, though Foxworth loses his for a consensual sexual relationship," the essay's conclusion reads.

"This is not just about the guy who six years ago had an affair and wrote a nasty e-mail," Johnson says. "Portland is one of the whitest large cities in America, so most people have very little contact with blacks in this city, and that being the case, how they make sense of stuff is based mostly on what they read."

Johnson is especially exited about the forum and plans for plenty of time for open discussion.

Slated as part of the PSU Black Bag Speaker Series, the forum discussion will include Oregonian columnists Renee Mitchell and David Reinhard, Nick Budnick of the Portland Tribune and Opio Sokoni of KBMS Radio. Jointly sponsored by the PSU Black Studies program and the Multicultural Center, the event will take place on Tuesday, Feb. 5, from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the MCC, Room 228 of the Smith Memorial Student Union, 1825 S.W. Broadway.

Vanport Square Success

continued ▲ from Front



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Restaurant, Living Color Beauty Supply, Kaiser Group, Laura Carey Design, Rick Harris and Associates, Vanport Café, Tran Allstate Insurance, Avita LLC, Norell Design and Cascade Energy.

Officials say up to 70 jobs will be retained or generated by the project. A second phase of the development is expected to bring the construction of a 24-Hour Fitness to the corner of Northeast MLK and Alberta Street.

Developer Ray Leary (left) and Old Town Pizza Owner Adam Milne celebrate the opening of Vanport Square, a major office and retail complex in the heart of the King Neighborhood. Old Town Pizza will be one of Vanport Square's original tenants when it opens in May.

Schools on Focus at Expo

Nearly 15,000 parents, students, teachers, administrators and community members are expected at Celebrate! Portland Public Schools from 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 2, at the Portland Expo Center.

Every school and program will be represented at the fifth-annual event. The schedule also includes student dance and music performances, an exhibition of student artwork, and a full-size replica of a kindergarten classroom. High schools will offer information on their sports programs, language centers, clubs and scholastic achievements.

Celebrate! also will provide information regarding student transitions, whether starting kindergarten or moving up to middle or high school. Staff members will be available to help answer questions about navigating new schools and the district transfer process.

For more information, visit the Portland Public Schools Web site, pps.k12.or.us, and click on the Celebrate! PPS link.

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