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38
years of
community serviceSpecial
Coverage
IssueBlack
History
Month

Emotional Portrait

Local playwright
explores love and hate
in America

See Metro section, inside

The Portland Observer

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Week in
The Review

Largest Beef Recall

The U.S. Department of Agriculture on Sunday ordered its largest beef recall, surpassing a 1999 ban of 35 million pounds, by condemning 143 million pounds of frozen beef from a California slaughterhouse that is the subject of an animal-abuse investigation and had sent meat to school lunch programs.



MLK Lieutenant Dies

The Rev. James E. Orange, a lieutenant of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference who worked alongside the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights movement, died Saturday. He was 65.

College Shooting Tragedy

Dozens waited in near-zero temperatures, some clutching flowers and cards, to pay their respects Tuesday to one of five students killed by a gunman last week at Northern Illinois University. Investigators still haven't determined what set off Steven Kazmierczak, 27, who opened fire during a science lecture before committing suicide.

Pakistani Upheaval

Pakistan's ruling party conceded defeat to the opposition Tuesday in parliamentary elections that could threaten the rule of President Pervez Musharraf, a key American ally in the war on terror.

Civil Unions Fall Short

A civil-unions law has failed to ensure that same-sex couples in New Jersey enjoy the same rights as married heterosexuals, an official report said on Tuesday. On the first anniversary of implementation, some employers have refused to provide benefits to the civil partner of employees.

OHP Expanding Rolls

More than 66,000 people have signed up for a reservation list to receive Oregon Health Plan applications. At least 3,000 people selected at random will be sent applications for standard benefits. Adults without health insurance may put their names on the reservation list through Feb. 29 at Oregon.gov/dhs.

Soups Turn Healthier

The Campbell Soup Co.'s kid-oriented soups, which feature characters such as Dora the Explorer and Batman on the cans, are getting their second sodium reduction in three years. The 480 milligrams per serving will legally allow the company to label them as healthy foods.

Emerging from Crisis Mode

Schools' chief sees opportunity

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Just passing her 100th day as superintendent, Carole Smith has guided Portland Public Schools into a position of calm not seen since the '80s.

Smith, who directed Open Meadow alternative schools in north Portland for more than 20 years, is focused on the input of principals, teachers and parents to achieve quality education at each and every school, hopefully for generations to come.

A homegrown leader, she follows a series of more controversial, out-of-state types like predecessor Vicki Phillips, and other superintendents and interim superintendents who frantically had to deal with left-over problems.

Two controversial leftovers for Smith have fizzled to near non-issues. The unions representing PPS custodians, bus drivers and food-service workers reached tentative agreements with administrators over salary and benefits. Secondly, proposals to reconstitute school buildings that incensed some community members have turned into avenues for discussing priorities with regard to school maintenance and restoration.

"I'm a really different leader than what people are used to as superintendent," she told the Portland Observer. "I'm not here just for a few splashy accomplishments. I'm



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Carole Smith, superintendent for Portland Public Schools, recently obtained a top role in order to empower communities.

looking to lead the schools for the long term, for at least 10 years out."

A district emerging from crisis mode, after more than a decade of budget cuts mandated by a state property-tax limit adopted in the early 1990s, is giving Smith the oppor-

tunity to address ongoing issues.

Considering the budget limitations, enrollment uncertainties and changing demographics, Smith acknowledges several balancing acts that will completely satisfy no one in the short term. But, in a lasting way,

she has great hope for an inner-city school district that embraces the requirements of all families within its boundaries, including gentrifying communities of color.

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PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Cornetta Smith is gathering materials and organizing to record the history of African Americans in Vancouver with a kick-off event scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 23 at 4:30 p.m. at the Vancouver Community A.M.E. Zion Church, 3601 E. 13th St.

First Black Families Chronicled

Vancouver NAACP gathers local histories

Vancouver's deeply rooted African-American community is a story that has gone largely unrecognized. It's a story of strong and productive people who came from across the country to live in Vancouver and Clark County and work in the Kaiser shipyards of World War II and stayed to make their homes here.

The Vancouver Branch 1139 of the NAACP is launching a history project, "First Families of Vancouver's African-American Community" to record these histories in a book-length manuscript that can be shared with current and future generations.

Longtime African-American residents and their descendants are encouraged to get behind the project during a public

reception at Community A.M.E. Zion Church, 3605 E. 13th St., on Saturday, Feb. 23 at 4:30 p.m.

Project staff and volunteers will present an overview of the project, followed by a question-and-answer period.

With a target date of 2010 for publication, the manuscript will be based on extensive interviews conducted by writer Jane Elder Wulff.

"The emphasis is on family and community," Wulff said.

Wulff and project director Cornetta Smith, whose sister-in-law, Ellen Thompson, was one of the original settlers, developed the "First Families" idea after working together on several feature articles for the Senior Messenger, a monthly newspaper published by the City of Vancouver.

"These families deliberately chose to settle throughout the community, not all in one place," Wulff said.

The Vancouver Housing Authority and the NAACP, which both began during the war, also helped make the history project possible.

"The upshot was that while we had no ghetto, our black community also had no visibility," Wulff said. "To this day, many people here don't even know Vancouver has a black community, let alone such a strong, productive one, with such deep roots."

The goal of the First Families project is to bring that community to light, Wulff said.

For more information, contact Cornetta Smith at 360-695-7179 or via e-mail at Mstex50s@aol.com; Jane Elder Wulff at 360-687-9872 or via e-mail at jwulff123@msn.com; or Earl Ford, Vancouver NAACP branch president, at 360-885-0644 or via e-mail at Earlwford@aol.com.

Fidel Castro Steps Down

American policy unaffected by move

(AP)—The Bush administration is ruling out any changes in its Cuba policy—including lifting a five-decade trade embargo—after Fidel Castro's resignation, while deriding his brother and heir apparent, Raul, as "dictator lite."

Led by President Bush, a chorus of officials expressed hope that Castro's departure would spark fundamental changes.

The ailing Castro, 81, announced Tuesday he would not accept another term in office when parliament meets to elect a new president this weekend.

Castro outlasted nine U.S. presidents who, with some minor policy adjustments, have steadily ramped up pressure on Cuba. The top three U.S. presidential candi-



Fidel Castro

dates all said Washington should look for ways to encourage democratic reforms in Cuba, steps that could lead to normalizing U.S. relations with Cuba later on.

Barack Obama, who is waging a hard-fought campaign with Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nomination, said the U.S. must be prepared to take steps to normalize relations with Cuba and to ease the embargo if Cuba's new leader "begins opening Cuba to meaningful democratic change."

Raul Castro has repeatedly offered to improve relations with Washington, even if the Bush administration shows no sign of taking him up on it. He has hinted he favors greater, if still limited economic freedom. And he's already allowed more, if limited public criticism of the government.

