

Foxworth Looks Back on 27-Year Career

Homegrown hero rose through the ranks

BY CHARITY PRATER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Former Portland Police Chief Derrick Foxworth, a homegrown law enforcement hero and the police bureau's only second African American chief, has retired after a tumultuous 27-year career.

Foxworth earned many accolades during his tenure in law enforcement for working with people in the community, training and recruiting more African Americans to the police force, and reforming bureau policy for the benefit of Portland residents.

"I had a good career," says Foxworth. "I feel fortunate and blessed to have been able to work with the finest people in the bureau and the community."

Foxworth, 50, began police work on Sept. 9, 1981. The Benson High School graduate first attended college as a business and marketing major. After graduating, he worked at US Bank for a year as he took employment tests to work in the police bureau.

His tenure as police chief ended in controversy after being accused by a police clerk of sexual harassment, which later led to his demotion and much negative publicity.

Foxworth said the scandal was not something he chooses to focus on, but instead leaves the remnants of the controversy for the media to judge.

Mayor Tom Potter demoted Foxworth

from chief to captain in 2006 after the clerk, Angela Oswald, accused Foxworth of sending her sexually explicit e-mails when he was commander of the Northeast Precinct.

Potter called Foxworth's actions a "serious lapse in judgment" and replaced him with current Chief Rosie Sizer.

Sizer then promoted Foxworth to commander of the Southeast Precinct, where last week, he finished out his law enforcement career.

"Being demoted strengthened my faith in God," says Foxworth, "when you get attacked you have to understand why and being an African American in a leadership position makes you more prone to accusations."

Another event which impacted Foxworth occurred on January 16, 1992 when an intruder broke into the northeast Portland house of 12-year old Nathan Thomas and took him hostage. In the process of the standoff, a police officer accidentally shot the young boy.

"During that time, my son was the same age as Nathan," says Foxworth, "that event led to a lot of changes in the bureau and within myself."

There was another event which Foxworth says he will never forget.

"There was an officer who was going through some personal problems in 1996 or 1997 and he took his own life," says Foxworth, "I kept asking myself if I had

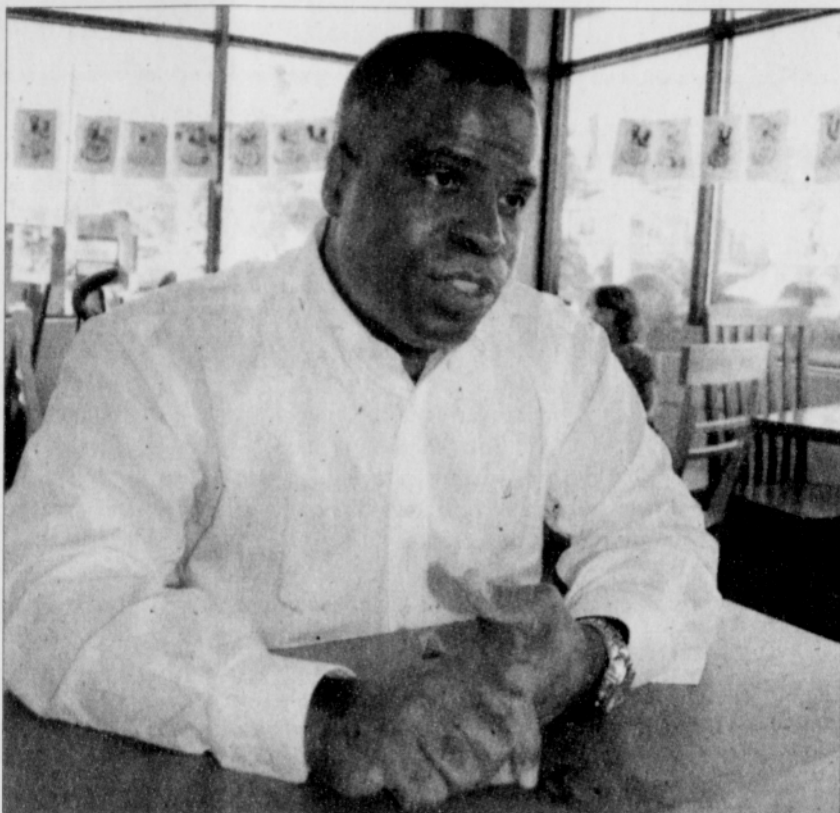


PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Former Portland Police Chief Derrick Foxworth looks back on his 27-years in law enforcement after retiring last week as commander of the Southeast Precinct.

missed a sign."

Foxworth says his career as a police officer was rewarding mostly because he was able to work with people in the community and fellow citizens to improve the city where he grew up. He worked mostly in north and northeast neighborhoods as

a patrol officer, before advancing in the bureau as an undercover officer in the drug division, working in gang prevention and becoming the police bureau's public information officer.

After 27 years on the force, Foxworth isn't sure what he is going to do in his

retirement.

"I don't have any plans. I think I'll just take some time off, get some projects around the house done," he says, "I've been working ever since I was a teenager so I'll have to spend some time giving thought to future ideas."

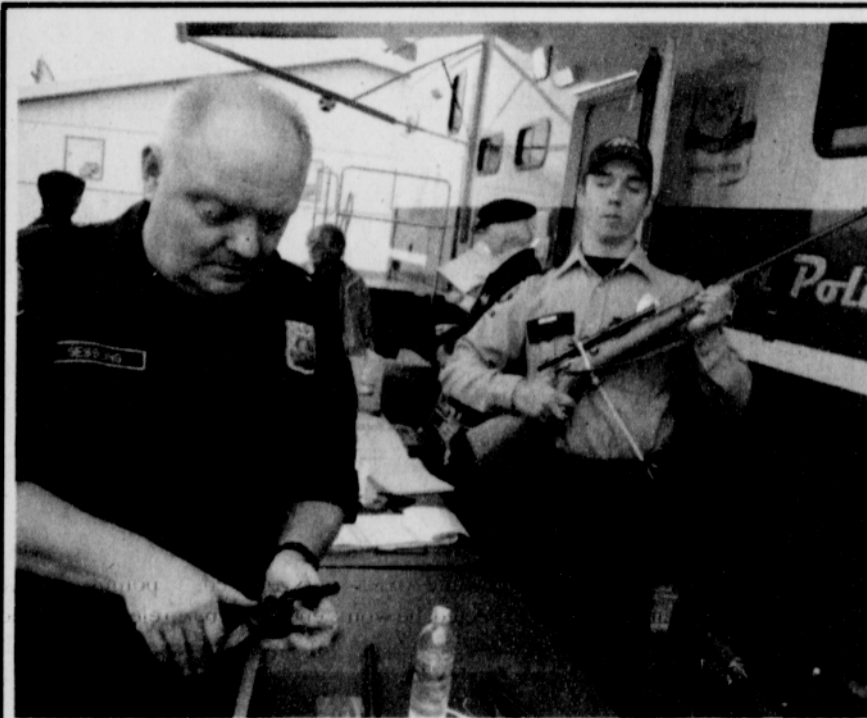
Foxworth is planning on relaxing and reflecting on the past so he can clear his head for the future. "I'm not quite sure what to do next."

At Foxworth's retirement celebration last Wednesday, his colleagues, friends and church goers thanked him for his involvement in the community and told him he would be greatly missed.

Tyrone Waters, the son of state Sen. Avel Gordly, recalled how Foxworth saved his life in 2001 by ordering those under his command to fire only beanbag rounds at him during an incident in which he was clutching a semi-automatic pistol. The pistol turned out to be a pellet gun.

Chief Sizer called Foxworth one of the hardest-working officers on the force. She said his legacy will be his deep commitment to the city and his ability to maintain meaningful relationships with residents.

Foxworth was quoted at the end of the 90-minute retirement celebration saying, "I feel good right now. I know I can say I did make a difference throughout my career. I only want to be remembered as someone devoted to helping others."



Unwanted Firearms Discarded

Portland Police Sgt. Tim Sessions (left) and police cadet Jordan Houck collect unwanted firearms from local residents during the annual Ceasefire Oregon Gun Turn-In last Saturday in southeast Portland. The event raises awareness of the risks and responsibilities of gun ownership, including the importance of safe storage.

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Jefferson Men's Academy to Close

The Portland School District will close the John H. John Leadership Academy for Young Men at Jefferson High School at the end of this school year.

Toni Hunter, assistant superintendent of high schools, said low enrollment prevented the academy from fulfilling its mission. The program opened last fall but never exceeded 55 students and now serves just 29 students in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades, Hunter said.

The announcement of its pending closure was made Monday during a special meeting with about

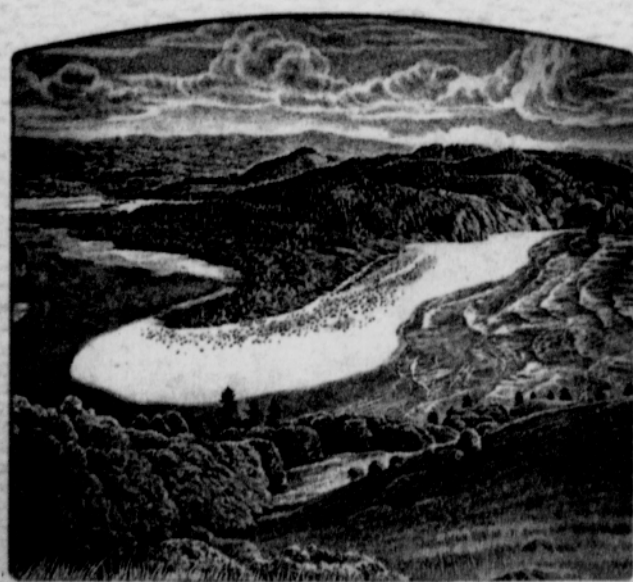
15 parents.

Hunter and Jefferson Principal Cynthia Harris promised to rebuild trust with parents by supporting families individually and make sure each student has a smooth transition into Jefferson.

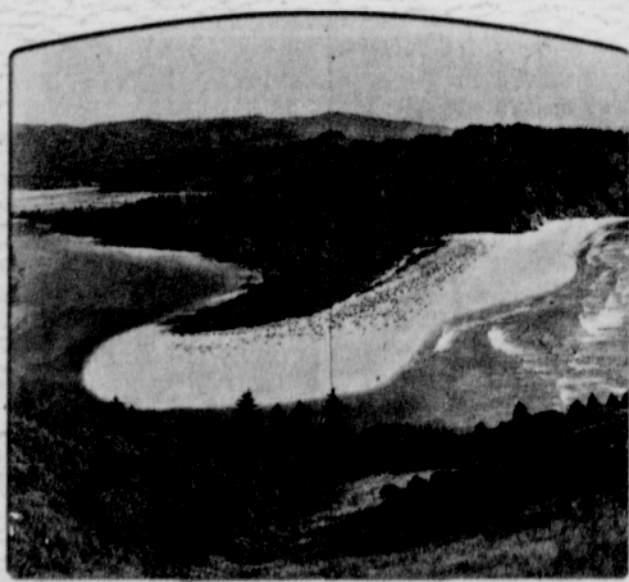
The school district will continue to operate its single-sex academy for girls at Harriet Tubman in north Portland. The girls school has 180 students.

Both programs opened last year in an attempt to improve Jefferson's academic standing and grow enrollment.

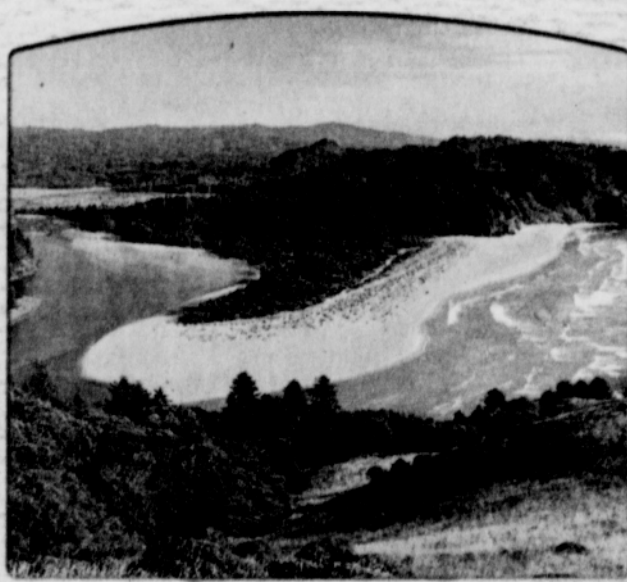
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