

Making Good on Minority Contracts

TriMet spreads work to the little guys

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
TriMet General Manager Fred Hansen remembers when he first heard about the "kaplunk" theory.

He was on the phone trying to get James Posey, the African American owner of Work Horse Construction, interested in the transit agency's new program geared toward steering construction contracts for

building the Interstate MAX Yellow Line to small and minority-owned businesses.

Posey remained dubious, telling Hansen that until he heard the dirt in the back of one of his dump trucks go "kaplunk," he would be uncertain about the program's benefits.

The next time Hansen took a call from Posey, all he heard was one word:

"kaplunk."

For the last 11 years, TriMet has sought to give small and minority-owned businesses a leg up with its Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program, which ensures that such businesses get a share of the mass transit agency's lucrative contracts.

The program has provided opportunities for small firms that would have otherwise been crowded out by their larger and better-connected counterparts.

TriMet paid over \$62 million on DBE contracts, about 16.5 percent of the work, on the recently completed MAX Green Line from downtown Portland to Clackamas County.

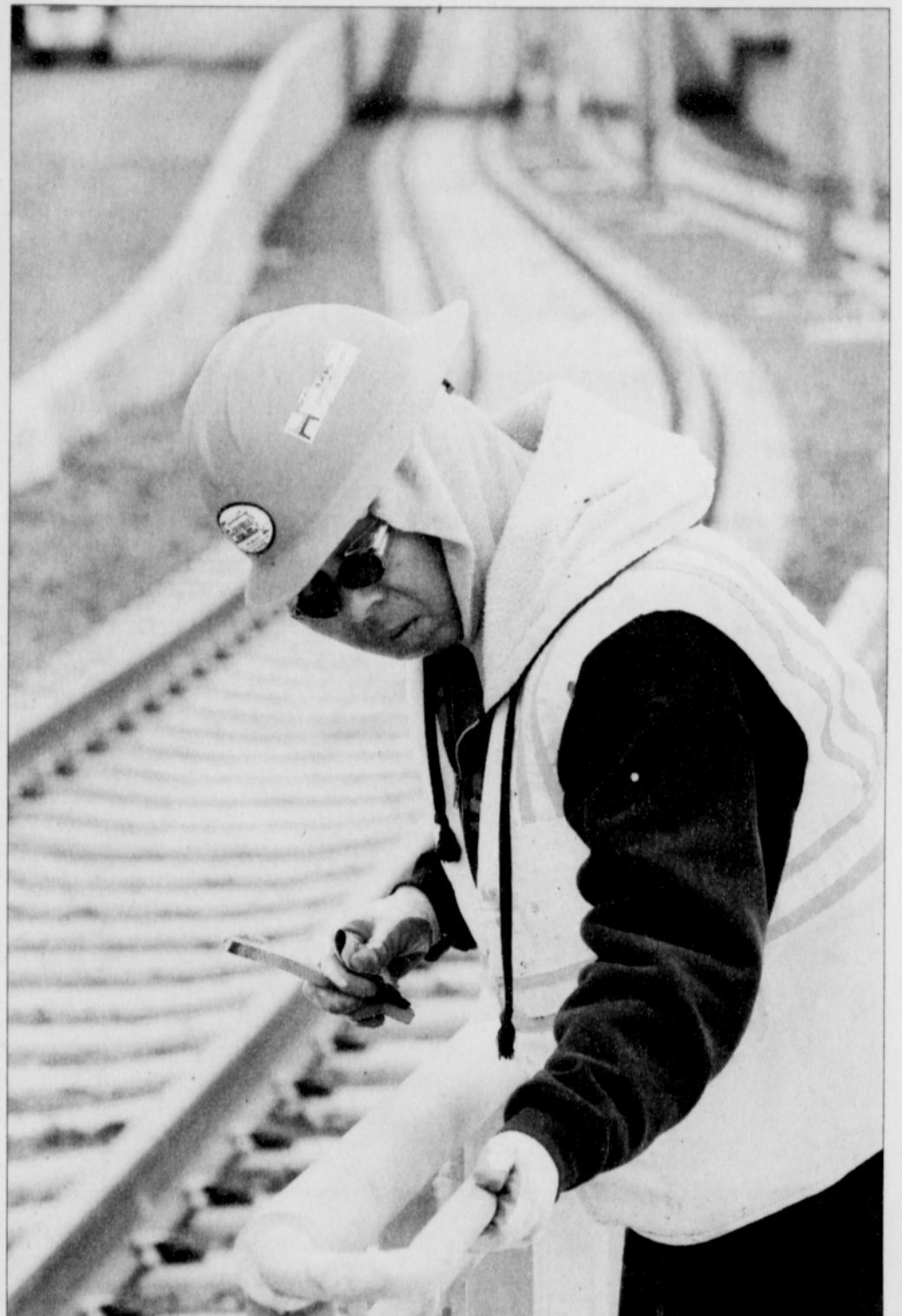
Jean-Wildy Malary, a minority contractor and owner of Affordable Electric, won a \$2.3 million contract to do electric work on the Green Line.

"It allows us to compete and get work and build capacity," Malary said of the contract.

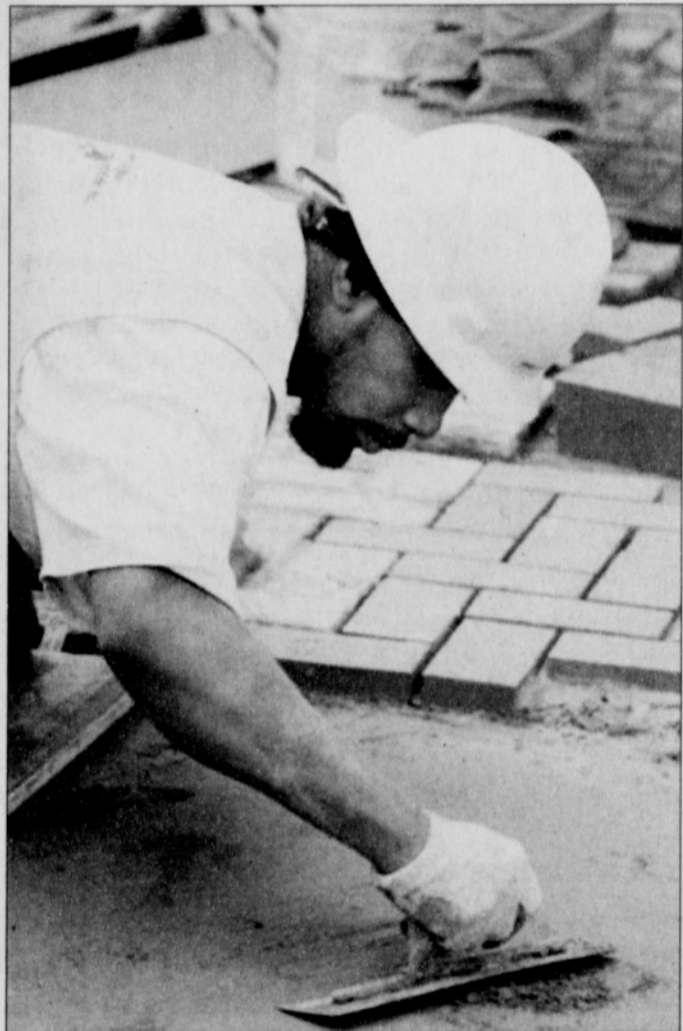
He said the opportunity to work on big public works projects gives smaller firms like his a chance to grow. Before getting the contract, Malary had two people working for him, after getting the contract he was up to 16, and now has eight people year round.

"It's a big deal," he added. Posey said that the DBE program helped him get out of the "funk."

The funk, said Posey, is the state of constantly being on



Tonee Fisher, an employee of A2 Fabrication, works on the I-205 segment of the new Max Green Line.



David Makasini lays bricks along the new Max Green Line in downtown Portland. He works for Raimore Construction, a firm that was hired as part of TriMet's commitment to promote small and minority-owned businesses.

the defensive because, as a minority contractor, he was perceived as incompetent.

"They would squeeze us out," elaborated Posey, who said that it's hard for small

firms to get certain contracts.

He said that these problems are absent with TriMet's DBE program.

Posey's company also par-

ticipated in the Green Line construction, which is the third his company has completed. He says the work has

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