

BLACK HISTORY

Vancouver's First Families Remembered

Black community reaches back generations

African American families who settled in Vancouver during World War II will tell – and hear – their life stories in the voices of today's young people at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 4 at the Clark County Historical Museum, 1511 Main St in Vancouver.

Four local high school students will read a script created from original family interviews by Jane Elder Wulff, who helped organize a historical project called "First Families of Vancouver's

African American Community: From World War II to the 21st Century." The event is free and open to the public.

Wulff and project director Cornetta Smith will introduce the program, and family members will be available to answer questions after the reading.

Project volunteers have been busy identifying and contacting black families who sought jobs in Vancouver's war-related industries and stayed to make their

homes here. Wulff is writing a book based on her interviews with family members.

The project's main sponsor, NAACP Vancouver Branch #1139, expects to release the book for sale early in 2011. Digital recordings of family interviews will be archived at the museum after the book's publication.

"What we're finding is that after the war, in spite of efforts to make them leave, these young



Cornetta Smith

families stayed in Vancouver simply because they liked it here," Wulff said. "What's more, they deliberately settled throughout the

area, rather than all in one place."

Because of that decision, she said, "Most people today don't realize we have this strong black community here that goes back decades. The courage and persistence of these families helped Vancouver to be ahead of its time."

Humanities Washington, Black United Fund of Oregon, Clark County's historical promotion grant program, and numerous individual donors have contributed funds toward completion of this work.



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