

Unity

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to grow closer to integration and work opportunities. "The trouble with the model was that it wasn't as temporary as it was intended to be," she said. "Jobs were supposed to be received, but it is problematic in the way it still segregates adults with disabilities."

The jobs offered in the past, she said, were often demeaning because many of them didn't pay minimum wage. "It is written in the law that you can pay people with disabilities below minimum wage if they don't perform to standards."

Ilyes said, however, the lower wages were not because the worth of the employees was less, but because the work opportunities available didn't fit the individual's abilities. "For decades, folks who were a part of it weren't offered the opportunity to grow," she said. "So this is where Project Grow came in."

At the studio, Dan, a member of the program, draws checkers and thoughtfully fills in the squares with several shades of colored pencils. "I think about designs all the time," he said. As one of the original artists at Project Grow, he explained he has been working in the art space for "a long time."

Before becoming a member of the program, Dan said he did pane work, sorted hangers and labeled bottles. He said, however, he is happier to be creating art, and "everybody is

nice here."

Larna, another artist within the program, agreed.

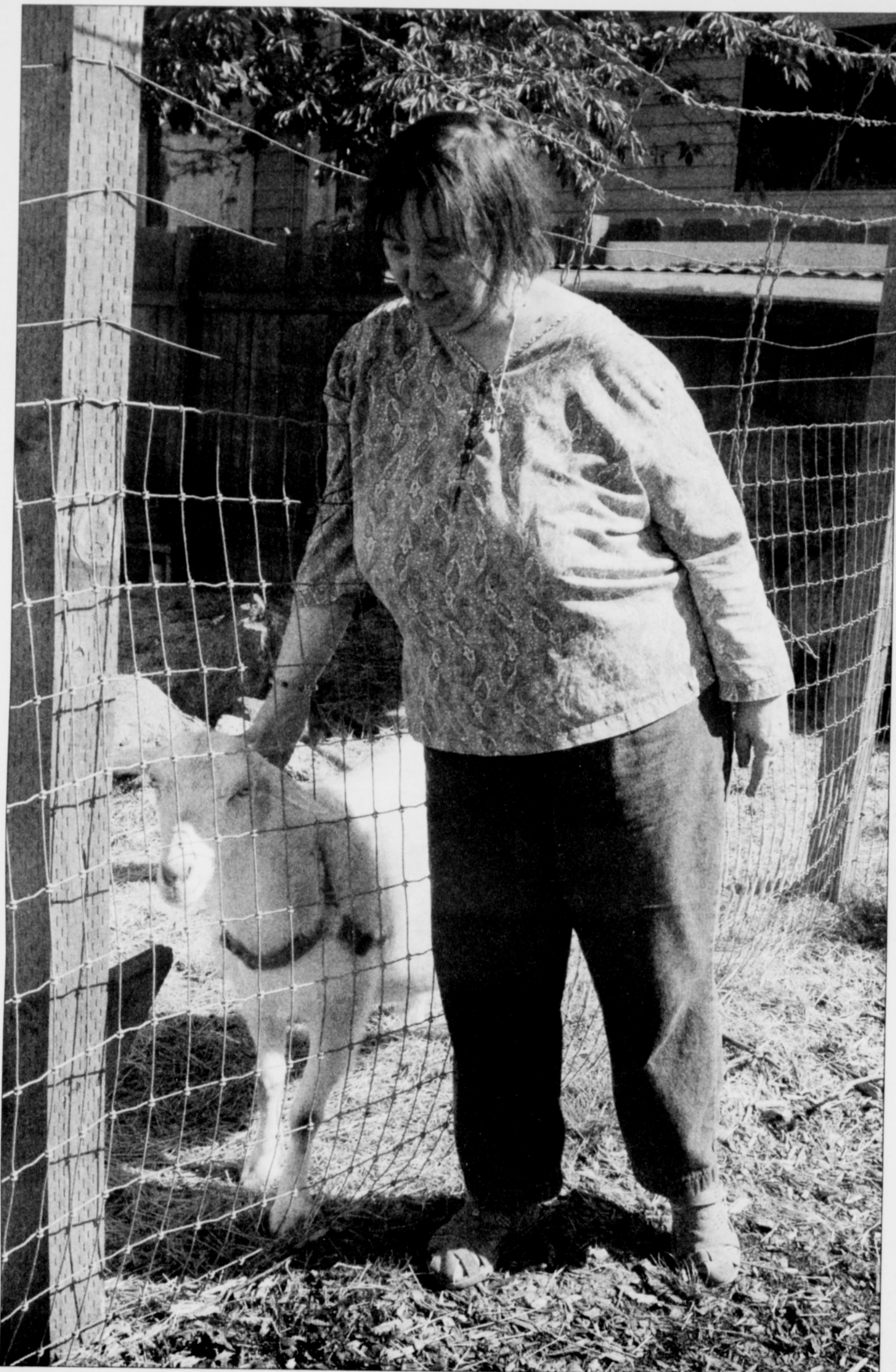
She was painting the largest work she has ever attempted, capturing the community goats with shades of purple, pink and yellow. Although she loves painting, Larna is paid by Port City for her work with the goats. Every morning she brushes them and makes sure they have food and water.

The original proposal of Project Grow included an art studio and an urban farm as part of the alternative model. "This was always part of the vision—to be a part of the system to change it from within," she said.

Today, Project Grow, which is funded by the state, has grown to 48 artists and urban farmers who practice there every day. "With each individual, we have certain amounts of dollars we get from the state," Ilyes said. "And we're rather fortunate because we also have an incredibly supportive community."

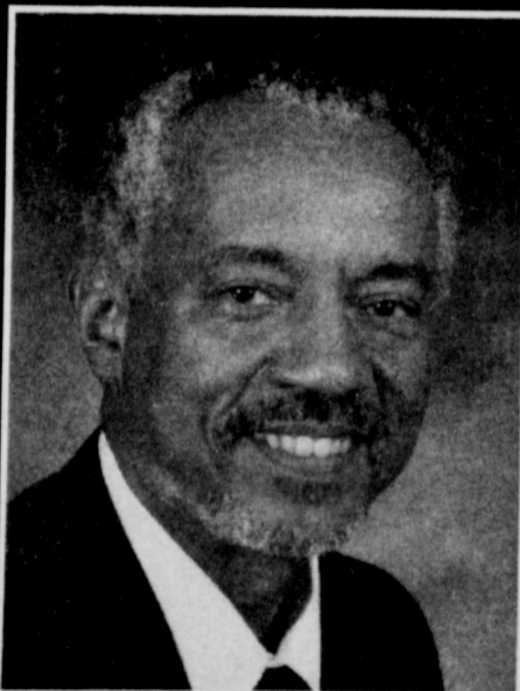
In addition to the art gallery and studio, the program has almost 2 acres of urban farm land that provides fresh produce to individuals throughout the neighborhood and a core group of seven staff collaborators, dozens of volunteers and a large number of individuals from throughout the community.

"It's truly an incredible space," said Timothy Donovan, the farm director for Project Grow. He said everybody has the opportunity to be-



PHOTOS BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Every day at Project Grow, a progressive program for adults with mental diversities, community member Larna feeds the goats that live on the lawn of the non-profit's artist studio and gallery in north Portland, where she always incorporates the animals into her artwork.



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