

# Highland Thanksgiving Tradition

## Church hosts annual community feed

Highland United Church of Christ will open its doors for at least the 35th straight year to offer a free Thanksgiving dinner to the homeless and the needy. The event will kick off a week-long celebration, concluding with legendary gospel vocalist Vanessa Bell Armstrong live in concert.

The Thanksgiving feed will take place on Saturday, Nov. 19 from noon to 3 p.m. at the Highland Christian Center, 7600 N.E. Glisan St. Church volunteers will also drop off home-cooked dinners to the sick and the shut-in. Last year Highland served over 800 meals. The church also serves the homeless by offering clothes, hats, gloves and shoes. Volunteer barbers give free haircuts.

The free concert in the center's Fellowship Hall will be held Friday, Nov. 25, starting with a 6 p.m. reception and a market featuring an on-site restaurant, vendors with Christian



No one is exactly sure how long Highland has been putting on its Community Thanksgiving Feed. It was started by the late Pastor Sam Johnson Sr. and wife, Opal sometime in the early 1970s, when the church was located on Northeast Ninth and Going.

The pair originally started the feed to serve soldiers who came home for the holidays and had no place to go. But soon, Pastor Johnson was picking up people on West Burnside and bringing them to the

*Pastor Sam Johnson Sr. and his wife Opal started the community Thanksgiving feed tradition.*

church to eat their fill of Mother Opal's cooking.

Pastor Johnson and Mother Opal have since passed on, but the tradition continues, serving hundreds.

Today, Rev. Dr. W.G. Hardy Jr., Highland's senior pastor, continues the tradition. The church's outreach includes free counseling through Good Samaritan Ministries, youth events and programs, prisoner reentry programs, and an on-site Head Start school.

clothing, jewelry, hats, shoes, boots, specialty deserts, and beauty and healthcare products. The concert will follow at 7:30 p.m.

Armstrong's music is well known. She is a multiple Grammy Award nominee and Stellar Award winner who recorded her first release, *Peace Be Still*, a gospel classic and her signature song. In 1987, she beat out stiff competition, including the likes of Aretha

Franklin and Patti LaBelle, for the chance to record the theme song for the popular television sitcom *Amen*.

Armstrong also had her Broadway debut the same year; captivating audiences in the musical *Don't Get God Started*. She has continually expanded her horizons and her audience, performing on Broadway and with her latest recording, *The Experience*.

## Gang-Related Death a Wake-Up Call

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also been a large number of violent crimes amongst youth that didn't result in a fatality.

According to Multnomah County officials, the arrest rate for youth violence, which includes violent crime, incarceration and mortality due to violence in north and northeast Portland, is higher than the national average.

Rob Ingram, the director of Youth Violence Prevention for the office of Mayor Sam Adams, said just because the awareness of the violence is higher doesn't mean there is necessarily more violence. He said, however, people are beginning to pay more attention, and there are a lot of reasons why.

"It isn't just because there is more violence, but also because there are more people speaking out about it and making the issue more personal," he said. "I have heard folks say, 'it was a tragedy because he was so young,' and some have serious concerns with the way his body was found. More and more community members are getting involved, and from my world, this is a positive."

With the pervasiveness of violent crimes of youth, and the homicide rate up, he said there needs to be as many people involved in this issue as possible. According to county records, arrests of 10 to 24-year-olds for violent crime, homicide, aggravated assault, and simple assault are 2,398 per 100,000 people in 2008—1.7 times the countywide rate.

According to the Gang Violence Reduction Team, which responds to all shootings and stabbings and serious assaults, gang-related violence has risen in the past six years, reporting an in-

crease from 68 call outs in 2009 to 93 in 2010.

"We will probably surpass what we were at last year," said Russ Como, an officer with the city's Gang Enforcement team. "And members of gangs are often as young as 10-years-old."

According to the Office of Youth Violence Prevention, a survey revealed that out of 1,671 youth, 763 or 46 percent responded that they have been recruited to join a gang.

Como said he has witnessed a rise in gang violence throughout the city, but when someone so young is killed at the hand of violence it always comes as a shock.

"We have had a lot of kids hurt by guns this year," he said. "It is alarming."

The highest level of gang related homicides reached 13 in 1997, he said. "Currently to date we are approaching double digits again, and that hasn't happened since 1997."

The week before his death, Marquez, under a different name, made posts to his Facebook page about his affiliation with the Surenos Gang, bragging about his love for gang violence and his experience as a juvenile on probation.

Como said young gang member's use of social media often spurs violence to occur. "We see a lot of conflicts come from gang members posting videos or trash talking other gangs on Facebook or YouTube," he said. "It goes back and forth, and then escalates into conflicts on the streets."

"And they like to boast about it," he said. "They brag, and it makes them feel like they are a part of something bigger."

Currently, there are no suspects in Marquez' death.

Como said he hopes individuals will contact the police bureau with any in-

formation related to the case so families and loved ones can receive closure.

"There is an anti-snitching culture," he said. "A whole culture involving gangs that makes things difficult to investigate the crimes."

Ingram said, however, the more community members who speak out the better.

"The discovery of Julio's body was a reminder for some folks that while we have to do everything we can for African-American youth, there are other things to continue working on," he said. "While the most public violence has been black on black violence, it is not to suggest they are the only group that has our attention."

According to Como, the gang enforcement team works throughout the year through youth and community outreach with strategies of both prevention and intervention.

"We also provide the enforcement piece, which is holding people accountable for when they do commit crimes," he said.

Years preceding his death, Marquez was in and out of juvenile detention for theft and assault charges. His current teachers said he was well-liked, a model student and good at math.

"The challenge is how to respond to a tragedy like Julio's and still, at the same time, stay invested in the front end of prevention," said Ingram.

"We need to create a community where our young people feel they belong as a part of it, so they no longer feel the need to create or join a group that could potentially get them locked up or murdered," he said.



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Kayla Norberg, 24, who has worked for Home Depot for five-years, helps clear the yard of a homebound senior on Northeast 25th Avenue as part of a Friends of Trees public service Leaf Harvest campaign.

## Leaf Harvest for Homebound

Residents and volunteers were second annual Portland Leaf Harvest.

Residents and volunteers were scattered about neighborhood lawns last week and over the weekend as they collected and bagged leaves from the yards of homebound seniors during the

The local non-profit Friends of Trees, which is dedicated to bringing

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