

Making the Impossible Seem Routine

In the life of every educational institution, there are events that stand out as high-water marks that will linger in the memory for years and decades to come. For Portland Community College's Cascade Campus, one of those events took place recently when our Technology Education Building was officially renamed and dedicated for former State Sen. Margaret Carter.

For a community college campus president, this is a pretty big deal. It's not every day that we get to dedicate a building, let alone do so for someone as eminent and respected as Sen. Carter. A virtual who's-who of Oregon politicians showed up to honor this extraordinary woman, including Gov. John Kitzhaber, U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, and a host of luminaries from state, county and local government, as well as family, friends and members of Portland's faith community.

The life of Sen. Margaret Carter is the story of a remarkable journey. This is a woman who made her way here from Louisiana some four decades ago as a single woman with six children in tow. She was at a crossroads in her life, and she had no way of knowing that the path she had chosen would lead to heights she never imagined.

And once she arrived here, among the roses and the raindrops, she bloomed. From the most challenging of circumstances, she climbed, giving of her time and talents in service to those less fortunate. She is living proof that it doesn't matter where you came from — it only matters where you're going.

And oh, what places she has gone. Sen. Carter got her start in education at Cascade Campus, and went on to become a counselor, an instructor, and the first African-American woman to serve in the Oregon Legislature. Along the way she has nurtured and guided a whole army of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She even found time to be the adopted team mom for the Portland Trail Blazers.

Cascade Connections

BY ALGIE C. GATEWOOD



In other words, she has spent the past four decades making the impossible seem routine.

Sen. Carter was the driving force behind the creation of a Cascade Campus program that now bears her name, the Margaret Carter Skill Center, which has helped more than 6,000 people from this community get the skills they need to find and keep a living-wage job. These are the most underserved among us, the people most in need of a way to lift themselves to a better place, and the Skill Center has helped them to do it.

Sen. Carter's life has been filled with many significant historical firsts. A former state chair of the Oregon Democratic Party, she was the first African-American woman to head a major political party in the American West. She is a past president of the National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women, the first Oregonian to be elected to this prestigious position. She was the first African-American woman to be elected President Pro Tempore of the Oregon Senate.

Carter was the author of landmark divestiture laws targeted to South Africa during Apartheid, and Sudan for genocide in the Darfur region. She helped create a state holiday to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and she continues to work for the betterment of all Oregonians, particularly those from traditionally underrepresented communities.

Sen. Carter has done all these things because, above all else, she cares for the well-being of this community. She cares about the hopes and dreams and struggles of the people she has so ably represented. In all my years of working in education, I have never met someone so passionately dedicated to her constituents, or so committed to the power of education to transform peoples' lives.

This campus, this community and

this state could not ask for a better

advocate or a more stalwart champion than Sen. Carter. It is fitting that future generations will see her name on a building where people learn the skills to transform their lives, just as Sen. Carter transformed her own and helped to do the same for so many others.

In my mind, there is no person more deserving, no person whose life's work is more worthy of such an honor. The Sen. Margaret Carter Technology Education Building will stand as a testament to her deeds, and an inspiration for others to seek greatness.

Algie C. Gatewood is president of Portland Community College's Cascade Campus.

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Urban Jobs Initiative



Urban League
of Portland

Save the date:

Wednesday, November 30th

Urban Jobs Initiative Community Forum

Date: Wednesday, November 30th, 2011

Time: 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Place: Humboldt Gardens
Opportunity Center
5033 N Vancouver Ave.
(NE of Alberta St.)
Portland, Oregon

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Panelists

Kathleen Saadat

Interim Diversity Development/Affirmative Action and
Inclusion Manager, City of Portland

Carl Talton

President, CEO and Exec. Chair
Portland Family of Funds

John Gardner

CAWS Investment Manager

Debra Lindsay

Director of Workforce & Development Urban League of
Portland

Sen. Diane Rosenbaum

of SD-21, Portland (legislative staff to attend)

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