

A Microcosm of Portland History

Insight to Woodlawn community shared

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

In a world, which is constantly shifting, one local historian and author of the book *Portland's Woodlawn Neighborhood* has watched both the people and trends of the neighborhood change over time.

Author Anjala Ehelebe moved to the Woodlawn district in northeast Portland with her husband nearly 28 years ago, when they settled into their new home in an area known decades previous for its street cars, bakeries and bustling commerce.

Inside her old, well-kept house that rests on the corner of Northeast Brazee, she said she has watched an evolution of the area, which at one time attracted residents from all walks of life from throughout the city.

"After World War II, the Vanport flood in 1948 displaced many African Americans," she said.

As individuals and families resettled, redlining practices directed the displaced workers from the wartime settlement to neighboring Albina, as well as the Woodlawn neighborhood.

"When my husband and I first moved to this neighborhood, I wanted to help make good things happen," she said. "So I joined the neighborhood association."

Although many people don't enjoy the association meetings, which she described as "sometimes not the most exciting," Ehelebe kept going year after year, and she began to hang around with older neighbors and ask them questions of the times before she arrived.

"They began to share their stories and old documents about how life had been in the Woodlawn when they were youngins," she said. "This is when I began to call myself the historian of the neighborhood."

One year, she said the chair asked her to write a history, originally an article, of the neighborhood, and after her documentation became public, a publishing company asked if she would be willing to write a book.

Publishers gave her a formula to include 200 photographs and 76 pages, and Anjala began her research adventure, once more, to capture the history of her neighborhood.

"Researching history is a blast," she said.

According to Ehelebe, before the



Anjala Ehelebe outside her home in the Woodlawn neighborhood of northeast Portland, where she has lived with her husband for more than 28 years.

Vanport Flood, the Piedmont neighborhood was the bedroom community to the Woodlawn's merchant practices.

"Piedmont had a convention so that no business would be located there, so that people would come over here to shop," she said.

Back in those days, the demographics of the neighborhood were predominantly white working class people, Japanese families, and a farming community.

In 1948, Ehelebe said African Americans began to move into the area after migrating for work opportunities in the ship yards and rail lines.

"After the flood, people needed a new place to stay, and housing was affected here," she said. "There had been red-lining, which is the practice of bankers and realtors not offering housing to minorities."

Although she said there is not much documented evidence of racial tension within the neighborhood at the time, Ehelebe explained the migration of African Americans into Woodlawn catalyzed a lot of white people to move out. She said, "In our neighborhood now, black people have been homeowners for three generations."

Ehelebe said, however, in addition to her historical research, she has watched throughout the years as the neighborhood constantly transitioned as banking practices changed, and the housing market shifted.

Although laws to end environmental racism have been enacted, she said, the neighborhood at the time remained redlined, and banks would not loan money for home improvements. "There have always been reasons for banks not to loan

money to certain customers," she said. "Such was the time, for a number of years."

Eventually, predatory lending practices by banks emerged, targeting those who lived in the Albina neighborhood while the housing stock declined, and houses, while not all, became increasingly "rat-tier."

Ehelebe also remembers when violence emerged in the 90s as a result of gang violence within the area, which she attributes to the implementation of a park within the neighborhood in the 80s.

"Woodlawn Park bloods were actively having gang warfare with the crips," she said. "And there were major criminal operations in different parts of the Woodlawn because of deliberate disinvestment."

Bullets were shot through innocent people's front doors on a distressing basis, she said.

Neighbors came to the Neighborhood association to try to find

continued ▼ on page 9

PHOTOS BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

S3 BROOKS STAFFING

A Division of S. Brooks & Associates, Inc.



Your Full Service Staffing Company

- Local & Federal Staffing
- Temporary Staffing Services
- Employee Recruitment & Executive Searches
- Consulting
- Apply & Test Online

Commitment to Diversity

S. Brooks & Associates is an Oregon-based, minority-owned staffing agency with deep roots in the Portland community.

It is our mission to provide ongoing employment solutions to employers and applicants that enhance and diversify the workforce. We hope to always provide the highest level of service to our employer clients and job seeking associates. We pride ourselves in being a vital part of the Portland, Oregon community, supporting local businesses, along with minority entrepreneurial endeavors.

Think Jobs, Think Brooks.

BROOKS STAFFING

RESPONSIVE, INNOVATIVE, DIVERSE

1130 NE Alberta Street
Portland, Oregon 97211

sbrooks.com
jobs@sbrooks.com
800.540.7930
503.284.7930 [o]
503.284.7977 [f]

MEMBER:



SERVING THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST FOR 30 YEARS