

Healthcare Blues

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Fame, knows many musicians join other Oregonians who suffer from the inability to pay for their own health care.

"Being a musician, I have participated in and contributed to numerous benefits for musicians without healthcare, including individuals diagnosed with Stage III Cancers," he said. "The cost is sky high for that kind of stuff, and if you are outsourced and lose healthcare insurance, that is astronomical stress on heads of households."

Sylvester said the community in Portland often comes together for their fellow brother and sister musicians to lend a helping hand in the name of health.

"We are all in this together," he said. "Medical insurance should be a right for everyone."

Sylvester, the father of seven and grandfather to nine, said family has always had a strong presence in his life.

As a child in Louisiana, he was influenced by his father, who was a singer in a gospel quartet.

His southern roots never left him in all his years as a musician in the Pacific Northwest, where he has

performed in countless venues throughout the region.

"When I was young I lived on my grandma's 110 acre farm. She was one of the biggest African-American farmers in Louisiana at the time," he said. "She believed everything that happened was special."

The gardens, he remembered, had everything from sugarcane to peanuts. "We didn't go to the store. We would just go out to the garden and get something. The same, he said, went for medical ailments. "We had home remedies. I didn't get a cavity until I came to Portland," he said.

During his time at Jefferson High school, he said he asked his father to get him a guitar.

"My dad bought me an \$11.95 acoustic at a pawn shop, and he told me if I learned three songs, he would buy me an electric," said Sylvester. "And he did, but I learned way more than three songs."

Once Sylvester completed high school, he went on to earn his associates degree in heavy duty equipment mechanics and worked at a trucking company. But the job was not the only means of income for Sylvester. He would work his day job, and then perform his soulful

blues at night.

In 1987, he opened for BB King at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall.

Once the trucking company went bankrupt, however, Sylvester never feared having nothing to do. He went through a dislocated worker's program to help guide his unemployment, and told them, "I'm gonna play music," he said.

"The lyrics I have on my songs are the lyrics of my life, and the first song on the first track was written at the trucking company," he said. "But I had to keep my children in medical insurance. I worked at the company for 20 plus years because they had such a good benefits package."

Sylvester said, he knows first-hand the pain and toll an expensive medical condition and recovery can have on a person, which is why he advocates so persistently of the importance of health coverage for all.

In 2000, Sylvester had to undergo a hip surgery on his right side because of lost cartilage from his trucking years.

Today, however, he has endured four surgeries, two of which he had to have complete hip replacements. "This was due to automobile accidents from being on the road playin' music that aggravated the resurfaced hips," he said.

As Sylvester faced health troubles, his local musicians union called up an organization based out of California called Music Cares,



Bluesman Norman Sylvester at his northeast Portland home with the first acoustic guitar he received as a child which was a gift from his father.

which paid for his bills one month and provided him with dental work. The organization, he said helps out artists who actively perform and record professionally.

"I am thankful we were okay, and it (the costs of surgery) didn't kill us because everybody is not that lucky to be in that situation," he said.

"Now I am a bionic Blues man," he joked. "And the hip is the Boogie Cat in town."

Sylvester explained how he's dedicated to support his fellow musicians as much as he can, like he was supported.

For the future, he said, it is going to take a lot of help from the corporate world to help the masses of people with healthcare problems.

Music is a way to drop any barrier in any conversation, said Sylvester, adding his excitement for the upcoming event.

"There will be a downstairs and upstairs ballroom, with tables about the single-payer movement, medical advice, informational documents, and of course musical performances," he said. "The festival is the humanitarian side of the movement. It will bring people together for awareness, education and musical enjoyment."

"I would hope that in the next year, or 18 months, that some major health care reform will be passed for not only musicians, but also for all families in transition," he said.

Tickets are available at Music Millennium, Geneva's, Pattie's Home Plate and by visiting ticketsoregon.com. For more information on the universal health care campaign, visit singlepayeroregon.org.

Please join us for a Candidate Forum

Tuesday, April 10th, 2012
4:30 to 7:30pm
The Billy Webb Elks Lodge
6 North Tillamook
Portland, Oregon



HOSTED BY:



National Association of Minority
Contractors of Oregon

PARTICIPANTS

Portland Mayoral Candidates:

Eileen Brady, Charlie Hales,
and Jefferson Smith.

Portland City Council Candidates:

CPN1 Amanda Fritz, Mary Nolan,
Teresa Raiford and CPN 4 Jeri
Williams (invited),
Steve Novick (invited).

Metro Council Candidates:

Helen Ying (D5) Sam Chase (D5)

Urban League Appoints Watts

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strengthen and focus the agency for a new leader."

Watts was employed by TriMet from January 2000 through May 2011. As the Senior Director of Diversity & Transit Equity in the office of the General Manager, he led the development and implementation of Transit Equity and Disadvantaged Business

programs for TriMet.

He currently provides DBE and consulting services under contract for TriMet and for several other public agencies. He has also worked extensively in the community to create opportunities for individuals and the community.

As a member of Coalition of Black Men since its inception in 1988, Watts first served as the

organization's secretary, then the program director for six years and as its executive director for two years.

He is a founding board member of the Josiah Hill III Clinic, established in 2000. He is also a board member of the Metropolitan Contractors Improvement Partnership, a business development, support and training program for historically underutilized businesses.

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