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Standing Your Ground

Activists join battle over foreclosures

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

It's not just the Occupy Portland movement that's putting economic disparity issues on the political landscape.

A new organization formed by labor activists to fight for a fair economy is increasingly helping local residents facing eviction take on banks, which have foreclosed on their mortgages.

Founded in September by the members of the Oregon Service Employees International Union, We Are Oregon began their journey by knocking on doors to talk to people who work for a living, but don't experience long-term stability.

"Folks, who work for living, especially poor communities of color, are on the short end of the power dynamic," said Angus Maguire, We Are Oregon communications director. "People say you should play by the rules, but the problem is the rules are broken."

Maguire said what makes his organization unique is that it is bringing people together to confront the problems that affect them.

The result, he said, has been the birth of several campaigns to help residents struggling against foreclosures, but also addressing issues like low wages, wage theft, and the availability of healthy and affordable foods for disadvantaged populations.

We Are Oregon took roots before the Occupy Wall Street movement spread to cities across America, but mirror much of the energy of Occupy by trying to solve an economic crisis for working families and

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PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Debbie Austin celebrates Mother's Day on the front porch of her northeast Portland home. Skyrocketing bills from cancer treatments and other health issues put her family into bankruptcy and now they are struggling to keep the house as a bank executes a foreclosure.