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Waters of Change

Tour remembers the city of Vanport

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

More than 30 residents joined historians, the Columbia Slough Watershed Council, and the Black United Fund for a memorial tour of the city of Vanport, where residents, including a large African-American community, were forced from their homes by flooding.

The group met last Wednesday, 64 years from the fateful day of May 30, 1948 when at 4:17 p.m. a railroad dike burst, causing floodwaters from the Columbia River to consume the growing community, the second largest city at the time of the disaster, which left at least 15 dead and thousands homeless.

A one hour tour of the flood site started from the Delta Park/Vanport Max light-rail station and park and ride in north Portland. The station is decorated with several historical installations about the flood, created by local artists.

Northeast Portland resident Dwain Taylor, 67, attended the tour because he wanted to learn more



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Ed Washington (left) addresses a tour of the former city of Vanport, starting at the Delta Park/Vanport Max light rail station in north Portland. Vanport was home to many African-Americans before the city was washed away by floodwaters 64 years ago.

about both the history of Vanport and the Columbia River before the construction of dams.

"My aunt lived here during the

shipyard days," he said.

According to Susan Barthel, Columbia Slough coordinator and leader of the tour, the railroad em-

bankment was serving as a levy, but weak spots catalyzed water to eventually seep through.

"Vanport was built in a hurry, in

about nine months, for war workers' housing," she said.

Others who experienced the flood first-hand shared their thoughts on what it was like to watch their lives change almost instantly.

"It changed our lives forever. We lost everything we owned, except what my mother had in her suitcase," said Ed Washington, who lived in Vanport from the time he seven to 11-years-old.

Washington, like many residents at the time, moved with his family to Vanport in 1944 from across the country after his father found work during the war time effort.

"People were living wherever they could," he said, adding that the city of Vanport was a big change for his siblings and mother, who said she had never seen so many people.

"It was a 24 hour town," he said. "As I look back on it, it was also a time when kids were breaking away, and beginning to change."

According to the Oregon His-

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Honored for Courage and Leadership

Sherri Murrell is the only openly gay coach among her peers

Portland State women's basketball coach Sherri Murrell was honored on Wednesday with a Leadership Award at the Equity Foundation's 1st Annual Women's Leadership Luncheon at the Portland Art Museum's Sunken Ballroom.

Murrell, who just completed her fifth season as the Vikings' Head Coach, received the Leadership Award for her courage and leadership as the only openly gay Division I Women's Basketball Coach in the U.S.

Former Oregon Governor Barbara



Portland State University women's basketball coach Sherri Murrell (left) is being honored for her courage and leadership as an openly gay coach in big college athletics.

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