



Mississippi
Alberta
North Portland

MIETRO

Vancouver
East County
Beaverton



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Oregon Historical Society exhibit 'Oregon Voices' inspires residents to examine both what it means to be an Oregonian and explore the unique communities of the state, including the African-American population.

Good Times and Bad

'Voices' exhibit explores our challenges and successes

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A new exhibit 'Oregon Voices' opened last month at the Oregon Historical Society to inspire residents to examine both what it means to be an Oregonian and explore the recent history and unique communities, which have made Oregon the unique state it is today.

The long-term exhibit, free to all Multnomah County residents throughout the year, features interactive displays, videos and programs that explore the challenges and successes of Oregonians from World War II to present day, in both good times and bad.

"It was really exciting working on this because we are looking at what is happening right now," said Larry Johnson, director of the films and interactive programs featured in the exhibit. "That, for me, is fun and new for an art museum, and hopefully meaningful for those to come."

According to Johnson, the heart of the exhibit is multicultural.

"Although the numbers of the populations of ethnic communities aren't great, they have an important impact on the nature of Oregon," said Johnson. "That is what it is really about. It is a portrait of Oregon now."

Throughout the past several

years, Johnson met with dozens of people and conducted approximately 40 interviews to make the Oregon Voices exhibit true to its name.

The exhibit, on the first floor of the Oregon Historical Society downtown, invites visitors to begin with a short film spanning with perspectives from across the state, before walking into the exhibit, where residents can take a deeper looker into many different pockets in Oregon, including a look into a black-owned barber shop in north Portland.

"A lot of times museums will have narrated programs that tell you just what to think," he said. "But I have

always tried to bring the authentic voice of the people to the exhibit."

Although there museum space is not grandeur, the information within the walls of the installation, including high-definition touch screens to press at one's choosing, would take more than nine hours to experience from start to finish.

"We are presenting a thoughtful look at all the things that are going on, and have been going on, since the world war," said Johnson. "I think it will be relevant to a lot of people directly in their lives. They will be able to remember some of the events we depicted in the exhibit."

As director, Johnson said his

goals for the project were to bring the face of Oregon to the screen.

"We went all over the state—north, south, east, west—and interviewed people over about 12 days," he said.

Johnson added, throughout the entire process, diversity was always built into the mission.

In eastern Oregon, the team spoke with a wheat farmer, a Japanese Nisei onion grower, and a bask sheep herder and farmer, all given a spotlight. Urban stories include a program about the African American community, the Asian community

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