

# Revisiting Alberta

continued **▲** from front

occupied, particularly of note since African Americans were and remain an overwhelming minority

in the city, totaling about 8 percent of the population even today.

At the time northeast Portland was home to about two thirds of Portland's abandoned houses.

Boarded up properties, vacant lots, litter, garbage, and wildflowers were some of the common realities on this side of town.

"There really wasn't much here," said Nate Hartley, an African American business owner who set up his petroleum and oil company on Alberta Street back in 1991. He says the area was severely blighted at the time. "For blocks, it was way different, there were no businesses," the 74-year-old said.

With more than two successful decades under his belt at his current location, Hartley says the economic upshift in the area that has been good for business but he wishes the upturn did not leave so many other black people behind. Hartley is one of the few remaining black business owners on Alberta today.

High-end grocers, healthy eateries, galleries, and coffee shops now sit in place of the blemishes that not long ago were commonplace in the centrally located neighborhood. Many of the black families that called the area home now live on the outskirts of the city. Census figures show that in the few neighborhoods that were majority black, whites have quickly become the majority.

Amongst this reality, Grice and Zybach want to recreate a project that can hire young, minority residents to study the current issues facing Alberta. This time, the pair says the students can tackle issues more pertinent to the time, like gentrification, gang violence, and the monthly arts walk "Last Thursday" which has infused the thoroughfare with festivities starting in 1997, but also spills crowds, noise and parked vehicles into adjoining residential properties. The area is now popularly referred to as the "Alberta Arts District."

Using newspaper articles, books, black and white photographs, hand drawn diagrams and other tools at their disposal, the original study's 150-page report concluded Portland's black population was being neglected and systematically left for poor but was sitting on a wealth of re-

sources.

Grice, a lifelong mentor to young black males in Portland, said a revival of the Alberta Street study would present a huge opportunity for not only for students but the city as well.

The proposed "Alberta Street 2014 Project, Cultural Resource Inventory with Recommendations" project would employ up to 20 high school pupils from the minority community for 8 weeks. Duplicating the exact same boundaries as the '92 report, the students would use updated maps, models and pictures, and conduct their own interviews of current residents and business owners. The end result would be a presentation of recommendations to the Portland City Council based upon their hands-on research.

Ultimately, Grice would like the new study to serve as a national model on how not only to push back against gentrification, but build community wealth in neglected areas. They would look at how the economy of the area changed, examine what led to the displacement of former residents, and talk with current occupants of the neighborhood's homes and businesses.

Current collaborators for the project's renewal include Oregon Websites and Watershed Project, Inc.; World Arts Foundation, Inc.; Cascade Pacific Council, Boy Scouts of America, and the Portland Development Commission.

Grice and Zybach have been attempting to regain contact with the original six students that brought the first project to fruition. To date they've been successful locating Monica Owens who was not only elated to hear from her two former project leaders, but informed them that listing the project on her resume' in her early days got her into jobs she wouldn't have been considered for otherwise.

For more information on the new initiative or how to get involved, email Zybach at [ZybachB@ORWW.org](mailto:ZybachB@ORWW.org) or Grice at [mcg@nothingbutquality.com](mailto:mcg@nothingbutquality.com).



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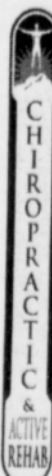
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