



The New Year started with Multnomah County being led by a County Commission in which all the elected members are from minority groups for the first time ever. Pictured (from left) are County Chair Deborah Kafoury and Commissioners Sharon Meieran, Jessica Vega Pederson, Lori Stegmann and Loretta Smith.

Role Models of Color

County achieves first majority minority board

Multnomah County ushered in the New Year by welcoming three new commissioners to its board and setting a new bar for diversity in representative government with every elected member of the commission representing a minority group, the first time that has ever happened.

Sharon Meieran, who represents west Portland, was sworn in along with Jessica Vega Ped-

erson, who represents east Portland, and Lori Stegmann, who represents east Multnomah County and Gresham. They join incumbent Commissioner Loretta Smith, who represents north Portland and Chair Deborah Kafoury, who leads the board.

"This is a milestone," said Stegmann. "As an immigrant, as a minority woman, as someone who grew up in Rockwood, one

of the poorest neighborhoods in Oregon."

Stegmann is the first Asian American elected to the board. She was adopted as a baby from South Korea and raised in a low-income family. Her father worked as a logger and her mother cared for the family. She still remembers the stigma of receiving food stamps, sticking actual stamps to a card in what was like a shameful

version of Bingo in exchange for blocks of cheese, powdered milk and other donated foods.

"Why is there so much shame in being poor?" she wonders. "Often times you don't have anything to do with it."

Growing up in the 1970s, Stegmann said she wanted to be like Marsha Brady of the Brady Bunch TV series, blond and fair skinned.

"When I was growing up, I

didn't have any role model of color," she said.

That has changed. Stegmann grew her own business as an insurance agent, bought a house in a middle class neighborhood, and raised a daughter, who at 18 can now see a woman serve as Gresham's police chief, women lawmakers in both her house and

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