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# Celebrating BLACK HISTORY MONTH



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PHOTO BY ZACHARY SENN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Louis McLemore is recruiting new members to increase the life and vitality of the Billy Webb Elks Lodge, a historic community space at 6 N. Tillamook St. born from Portland's segregated past and a key social landmark for the black community today.

## Promoting a bright future for Billy Webb Elks Lodge

BY ZACHARY SENN  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A historic center of Portland's black community is seeking recognition and revitalization this year. The Billy Webb Elks Lodge has embarked on a membership drive to bring new life to the longtime community space that was born from Portland's segregated past and is a key social landmark today. Work also is underway to add the building to the National Register of Historic Places.

# Resilience and Triumph

Located at 6 N. Tillamook St., the lodge was originally constructed by the YWCA in 1926 to reach out to Portland's black community. People referred to it at the time as the "Williams Avenue branch" or the "Colored YWCA." The building was

also used by the Portland NAACP, the Congress for Racial Equality, and the Urban League of Portland.

Black Elks took over the site in the 1940s and named it after Billy Webb, one of the great jazz musicians of his day.

"He played here in Portland, and on steam ships on the West Coast," said Louis McLemore, the current exalted ruler for the social club. A member of the lodge for the past six years, McLemore is leading a campaign to make sure the building will serve the black community for future generations.

Raymond Burell, a Portland native who has dedicated his time to preserving a historical record of the city's black community, is working to place the lodge on the historic register, like he helped accomplish last year for the nearby Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church.

Given the rapidly gentrifying nature

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