

Resilience and Triumph

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

of Portland's historically black neighborhoods, Burrell believes that it is more important now than ever to protect the black community's heritage. At 90 years old, the lodge can attest to the struggle, resilience and triumphs of Portland's black community.

"Landmarks, like the Elks Lodge, can also stimulate revitalization," Burrell asserts.

McLemore joined the Elks after moving to Portland to spend his retirement with family. He explains that the need for a black social club was borne out of the segregation of the early 20th century. Under ownership of the Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks, the building has long been a longtime hub of Portland's black community, including through watershed moments in the city's history, such as the Vanport Flood.

"This was a clearing house for the relatives of those who had been separated by the flood," he explains.

Today, the lodge continues its long-standing tradition of community service, hosting parties, family reunions and celebrations of life. A myriad of other clubs and organizations, like the National Association of Black Veterans, make use of the Elks' hospitality.

McLemore says that he hopes 2017



The Billy Webb Elks Lodge at 6 N. Tillamook St, pictured with its new shingle siding from a renovation a few years ago. The lodge is the one of the last venues that Portland's black community can call its own.

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will see a period of revitalization for the lodge.

"We're trying to get younger people in here, so we can pass the torch onto them," the 72-year-old explains.

In addition to recruiting new members, the lodge is hoping to install an industrial kitchen so that it can cook low-cost meals for seniors.

"We're trying to develop new programs for the community," McLemore says, explaining that he anticipates funding for building renovations and new programming through a combination of grants and community donations.

"This is the center of the black neighborhood," McLemore says. On the lodge's historic significance and its cur-

rent activities, he says that he is continually surprised by the personal histories that community members associate with the building.

"It's real interesting to hear about how people come back," he explains. "Everybody has a connection with the lodge somehow. 'It's been a lifeline for everybody... I just can't believe it sometimes.'"



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