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Celebrating BLACK HISTORY MONTH



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J.J. Moore, the longtime owner of Affordable JJ Lock and Key in northeast Portland, was only a teenager when he participated in the 1965 Selma to Montgomery civil rights marches that drew Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders to Alabama and led to the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

‘I Marched in Selma’

Portland locksmith recalls the beatings and the arrests

BY CHRISTA MCINTYRE
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

52 years ago, Portland locksmith and business owner J.J. Moore participated in the historic Selma to Montgomery marches to protest the massive discrimination facing black voters in Alabama. It was a pinnacle of the Civil Rights movement under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King of the Southern Christian Leadership Council, and a young man named John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordi-

inating Committee. Together with thousands of other black protesters, they helped turn the tide with the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 under President Johnson.

The small town of Selma is seated in Dallas County in the Alabama Black Belt. In 1961, while the population of Dallas County was 57 percent black, fewer than 1 percent were registered to vote because of discriminatory voting procedures. Without access to the ballot box, black citizens couldn't choose their mayor, governor, representatives in Congress, president or sit on a jury. Under Jim Crow laws separating blacks from whites, the path to voting was littered with obstacles. Lewis, who went on to become a Congressman, described how

at one Alabama courthouse at the time, black citizens were asked to name exactly how many gumballs were in a jar as a voter registration test requirement. Other black people who worked in the service industry or as sharecroppers in Dallas County were threatened by employers with losing their jobs if they registered to vote.

Moore's mother and father started out as cotton sharecroppers in Selma, where the future Portland business owner was born and raised. His father, Thomas, learned to be a painter by trade and his mother, Ollie Mae became a seamstress. Through their hard work and over time, they saved enough money to build a house from the ground up in Selma, something most black people didn't have the opportunity to do.

Owning their home and having skilled trades also meant they couldn't be pressured to not register to vote, because they had more economic independence than most.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee came to Selma in 1962 to start nonviolent direct action protests and conduct the grassroots work needed to get black Americans registered to vote. The group held training sessions to prepare for the literacy tests and other obstacles that were used to prevent minorities from voting. Many of these meetings were held in the famed Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church of Selma. A teenager at the time, Moore's par-

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