



In the Eye of the Storm
Plays speaking to issues of displacement
 See Metro, page 9

Terrorism in England
Deadly bombing at Grande concert
 See story, page 2



Portland Observer

Volume XLVI • Number 21



www.portlandobserver.com
 Wednesday • May 24, 2017



Established in 1970
 Committed to Cultural Diversity

Explore the Vanport Mosaic

Festival brings history to life

BY CHRISTA MCINTYRE
 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Vanport Mosaic Festival is a celebration to explore, educate and remember the history and impact of those who lived and died in a community that was destroyed by floodwaters 69 years ago this month while also illuminating stories of struggle and resilience that illuminate Portland's African American history.

A large line up of events told through film, theater and historical exhibits are planned for this Memorial Day weekend beginning on Friday, May 26 and continuing through Monday, May 29. The second annual festival is collaboration between artists, churches, educators and community groups who have worked for years to preserve the memory of this lost city.

The festival presents a thoughtful, thorough and fresh look at one of Oregon's most tragic events while also exploring issues of housing discrimination, migration and displacement that continue today.

Vanport, a combination of the names Vancouver and Portland, was built in 110 days, was the second largest city in Oregon for five years, and destroyed in less than one day. The town was created as a short term answer to a 1943 housing crisis that was brought on by thousands of people moving to Portland to work in the shipyards during World War II. It was the largest war-time housing development in the United States. The population at its height was 42,000 with residents who came from 46 of the then 48 states.

The migration of people to work building liberty ships swelled the African American population of Oregon by five fold. One-third of Vanport's population was black and represented the largest migration of black residents to Oregon up to that time.

Though the walls of Vanport's buildings were not built to last, the city left an incredible legacy. Vanport was uniquely designed to serve both black and white residents as an integrated community where residents went to the same schools, community centers, movie theater and stores.

Vanport College which later became Portland State University was built for and first served homecoming veterans who lived in Vanport. It was the students and teachers of the school who sent out an emergency warning to residents to flee the flood of May 30, 1948, when a levee broke and a ten foot wall of water from the Columbia River began to swell.

There was little time for people to reach safety. The

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



PHOTO BY CHRISTA MCINTYRE/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Marge Moss, a former resident of Vanport had a positive experience living in the city as a child.

Memories of Vanport

Survivor recalls flood and the aftermath

BY CHRISTA MCINTYRE
 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Marge Moss, a retired nurse and former employee at the Urban League of Portland, has been involved with the Vanport Mosaic Festival since its inception last year.

She was 12 when her family moved from the small town of Tallulah, Louisiana, to Vanport in 1944. Both of her parents worked in the shipyards and her father made extra money on Saturdays by giving haircuts for 25 cents a person. Her father, Ural Pete Moss was a church deacon at Vanport and also at the Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church, one of the Portland area's historic African American congregations.

On some Sundays after church, Moss and her family went to Vanport's popular 750 seat movie theater.

The family made a home in a standard Vanport apartment on a street called Broadacres, close to Denver Avenue. For Moss, who had lived most of her life in the South, Vanport was a positive and eye opening experience.

In the South, where segregation and Jim Crow Laws imposed a social and economic rule akin to the vestiges of slavery, Vanport offered the young Moss the experience of acceptance for all races. At school, in the community centers, grocery stores and movie theater people could move and sit where ever they liked.

In an interview with the Portland Observer, Moss remembered her Vanport interactions as riendly. No one had to sit at the back of the bus and no one had to drink from a designated

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4