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Community leaders plan for the upcoming 'Black Women's Gathering,' a revival of an event focusing on empowering and celebrating black women, healing, and a commitment of justice to strengthen families and the community. Pictured (from left) are organizers Joyce Harris, Stephanie Ghoston-Paul, Carol Tatch, S. Renee Mitchell, Debora Leopold-Hutchins and Adrienne Nelson.

Empowered Sisterhood

Date set for gathering and day of togetherness

A highly anticipated Black Women's Gathering focusing on empowering and celebrating women in the community will be a renewal of an empowerment group for local women and is expected to draw hundreds of participants.

The free event is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 28 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus, 705 N. Killingsworth St. An invitation is out for all black females from the community to attend. RSVPs are strongly encouraged by contacting the planning committee at blackwomensgathering@gmail.com

Embracing the theme, "Together We Rise in Strength, Unity & Community,"

the gathering is designed to affirm the power and emotional strength of black women, as reputable studies show black women are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of race-related stress.

For years, Judy Boyer, a longtime labor, community and political activist, was part of early Black Women's Gathering events when they were held at the Matt Dishman Community Center in north Portland. Boyer also participated in planning for the upcoming event.

"I look forward to a day of celebration as our theme of many years ago proclaimed, we come together as a celebration of our being, our spirits and our survival," she said.

The first Black Womens Gathering was organized in the 1980s after the domestic-violence related death of a black woman at the hands of her partner. The event was held annually for 20 years, serving as

a place for black women to share food, create alliances, develop mentors and reflect on community issues.

"There was a lot of pain, a lot of grief, of course," noted former Sen. Avel Gordly, who was part of the original planning committee. "We came together, needing, wanting to create a safe space where black women could be their authentic selves."

Many of the original attendees recalled that a powerful component of the programming was the open mic, where women could "say whatever was on their minds and be heard and be hugged," Gordly said. One year, instead of talking, she said, an attendee only screamed and was then hugged by other black women.

This year's event will also have an open mic opportunity, in addition to certified child-watch, healthy meals and informative workshops.

Organizers also are planning to honor

the achievements of black women leaders and business owners in the Portland area, as well as honor the civil rights legacies of black women who have passed on, such as Judge Mercedes Deiz, the first black woman to practice law and become a judge in Oregon; Bobbi Gary, an impassioned community activist who relentlessly fought against racial discrimination; and Chris Poole-Jones, who was the state's first black in a series of PPS administration positions and was also dedicated to social justice, among others.

"I'm just so happy and pleased that this is coming around again for a new generation to be a part of," Gordly said. "We really need this right now because there is so much pain and grief and fear. I'm looking forward to giving and receiving hugs that come from a place of real knowing, real understanding of who we are and what we need in these times. We get to be ourselves."