

Tubman's Revival

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

a bit," Butler told the Portland Observer.

Her father was Harold Williams Sr., an influential community leader who owned a consulting business, participated in public life as an education advocate, and was elected as a member of Portland Community College Board of Directors. He passed away in 2012.

It was back in the early 90s when her brothers attended Tubman. It since transformed into a young women's academy but that too closed down. The building has remained dormant for over five years.

"There's a lot of history here. And there are many families here that have been, as we know, displaced," Butler said. "So this is an opportunity to say there's still a place for you here. And Portland Public Schools is still committed to academic excellence and that we're going to do whatever's necessary to provide equitable opportunities for all students."

Butler has participated in dozens of community meetings and has coordinated with 26 school district departments in anticipation of the school's reopening. District officials report that she has received tremendous support from the four north and northeast Portland elementary school communities which will feed into Tubman, identified as Boise-Eliot-Humboldt, Irvington, Martin Luther King Jr. and Sabin.

"The support has been humbling," Butler said.

Tubman's re-opening was wrought with uncertainty last fall when the school board considered pursuing a backup location for its students in light of air quality concerns due to its proximity to a major freeway. But the district has since redoubled their commitment to its reopening after a community outcry questioned the legitimacy of yet another delay in a long line of

postponements by the district, though they'll still perform air quality and environmental testing. They've also set aside funding to perform repairs and install a new ventilation system.

Harriet Tubman Middle School and Roseway Heights are both two new middle schools slated to open this fall. Butler will helm Tubman and Kathleen Ellwood will be the principal at Roseway Heights.

Butler is drawing on the support of so many community members who are invested in seeing Tubman's reopening. She plans to integrate as many supports for the school as possible, from academics to tutoring to providing a high rigorous curriculum.

"My hope is that school can be everything that a kid needs," she said.

Another aim is to make the school a community resource, a place where parents might go to find help with their job search, for example, or as a resource for information about home ownership or how to do your taxes.

Butler is a former principal at Open Meadow (now Open School) in Portland. She was an assistant principal at both Martin Luther King Jr. School and Margaret Scott Elementary. She also was a former teacher at Whitaker and Beaumont Middle Schools.

Though she's had an illustrious career in education, she said she originally wanted to be a news anchor and pursued a speech communication degree as an undergraduate student.

"I was at a cross roads where I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do. And I was introduced to the Portland Teacher's Program. And a good friend said 'I think you should be a teacher.' And then the rest is history [...] thank God for second chances," she said.

Since then, Butler has earned two master degrees — one in education and one in administration from Portland State University and the University of Portland, respectively. She's since

put those skills to work in high ranking roles at SEI Academy, St. Andrew Nativity School, and De La Salle North Catholic High School, establishing academic programs, developing curricula, and creating training workshops for teachers.

She also was a department chair at Portland Community College, following in her father's footsteps. Harold Williams was the longest standing board member at PCC. He was so influential that PCC's basketball court is named after him. His picture is also on a place of honor on the side of the Urban League of Portland building, near Tubman, and a bench is named after him at nearby Dawson Park.

"He was definitely one who was a trend setter. Wasn't afraid to kind of push the envelope a little bit and get people to think outside the box," Butler reminisced. "My dad was very, very, aggressive about really maintaining a presence. Because he could forecast that this area was changing and that, you know, many families would be priced out of the market."

Butler said she tries to instill the values her father pushed, like making sure all his kids were educated and had passion for the community.

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