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Local book club makes it personal

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McCoy Building Opens

Public health site named after late black leader

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Committed to Cultural Diversity



PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church under the direction of Pastor Rev. J.W. Matt Hennessee celebrates 75 years this month. A mainstay in the African American faith community, the historically black and diverse church continues to be counted on for tackling social justice issues of the day, such as setting up job fairs, promoting education for black youth and feeding the homeless.

A Legacy of Action

Vancouver Avenue First Baptist celebrates 75 years

BY DANNY PETERSON
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church is celebrating 75 years this month, honoring its faith-based legacy for being an important epicenter for African-American life in Portland, where its members find a welcoming space to make an impact on social justice issues of the day.

Under the current guidance of Pastor Rev. J.W. Matt Hennessee, Vancouver Avenue has continued its historic missions of addressing social justice issues, including

the promotion of education to black youth; the sponsorship of job fairs; feeding people who are hungry; and other social causes. This year the church will undergo renovations to bolster public service efforts even more, including the creation of a black museum and dedicated educational space for underrepresented youth.

“We have been able, on the one hand, to really focus on the spiritual development of our church, but also be very involved in social justice, just as the church had been for many years during the time of Pastor

Williams,” Hennessee, who has been pastor since 2005, told the Portland Observer.

That legacy was set in place by the former pastor of the church, for 48 years, Rev. Oliver Booker “O.B.” Williams, and his wife Willa Ida Jackson-Williams. Williams started as a Sunday School Teacher at the church before taking over in 1945—when its membership was just 75—and oversaw its substantial growth during the civil rights movement from the 1940s to the 1960s.

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McGee, Dickson Not Guilty

Black leaders cleared after trial

BY MICHAEL LEIGHTON
PORTLAND OBSERVER

The founder and former chief executive officer of Portland’s Black Parent Initiative expressed his gratitude Friday after a judge found him and his co-defendant not guilty of sexual assault after a two week trial at the Multnomah County Courthouse.

McGee, 33, and Aubre Dickson, 44, a former bank executive and former chairman of the Oregon Housing Stability Council, prominent members of



Aubre Dickson and Charles McGee

Portland’s African American community, were charged with sexually assaulting a woman after a night partying nearly seven years ago.

Both men lost their jobs after the accusations were first levied against them by the alleged victim, Erica Naito-Campbell, 38, the granddaughter of prominent Portland real estate developer Bill Naito, in a story published in the Willamette Week.

Judge David Rees reached the not guilty verdicts Friday, finding the state failed to prove their case in a trial with no jury.

“I cannot conclude with moral certainty that the defendants are guilty,” Rees said.

The men were charged with touching Naito-Campbell sexually without her consent.

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