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LOCAL NEWS



Madison High School graduate Taj Ali (left) is congratulated for becoming the Valedictorian of his Class of 2019, the highest-scoring senior academically, from long time educator and mentor Michael "Chappie" Grice.

Highest Academic Honor

Senior makes history as Valedictorian

Madison High School Senior Taj Ali is an incredible human. The graduate has been named Valedictorian of his class of 2019 becoming one of the few male African-Americans to achieve the highest academic honor in this history of Portland Public Schools and in the annals of Oregon high schools.

Ali's hard work and consecutive years of dedication also has earned him several scholarships

and other academic honors, including an award for exemplifying the value of equity at the northeast Portland school. Valedictorian is a recognition accorded to the highest performing senior in each high school class.

He is known for his quiet and affable personality, a humble demeanor and fierce pursuit of excellence, all of which have earned him the admiration of his brothers, his peers and the entire staff at school.

The eldest of three brothers, Ali has interests in engineering, photography, law, social justice and environmental studies.

When asked his secret, he

calmly says it was the support of his family, who never pressured him, and the "joy of the results of consistent effort to be the best."

His mother Amina Ali, a retired and decorated teacher from the David Douglas School District, says, "Whether Taj becomes a great civil engineer, photographer, pilot or attorney he will be great, no doubt about it."

Ali received offers to enroll at colleges as far away as Clemson, Penn State, the University of Massachusetts and others, but settled on the Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon in Eugene, where he plans to attend next fall.

Police Reform Panel Falls Short

Feedback comes from judge and community

A federal judge has held off on giving his approval of a new community group charged with overseeing police reforms.

U.S. District Judge Michael H. Simon said of Portland's Committee on Community-Engaged Policing that he thinks it's going in the right direction, but that "I'm not ready to conclude it's adequate... until I see a record of positive performance."

Though he said the group has shown "tremendous promise" since it began monthly meetings in November, more assurance that the committee is effective is needed,



Rev. T. Allen Bethel

especially since its predecessor fell apart during inner tumult and lack of city support and then the gap went unfilled for more than a year.

The judge's comments came last week after hearing almost six hours

of testimony about the 2014 settlement between the city and the U.S. Justice Department over police mistreatment of people with mental illness, including from community activists who urged the judge to withhold making any judgments yet about the new committee.

Rev. T. Allen Bethel from the Albina Ministerial Alliance's Coalition for Justice and Police Reform said the 13-member committee hasn't been the new, improved, and better model that it was supposed to be and lacks the essential charge of community engagement.

Bethel added that its predecessor—the Community Oversight Advisory Board—often held contentious meetings, but they were publicly attended.

"We're lacking that here," he said.