

Salute to a Fierce Advocate

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“There are few people I would call a hero. You’re a hero,” remarked Mayor Ted Wheeler at the special ceremony at City Hall, calling Edwards the glue holding the community together and one who lent a voice to those that had none, declaring July 31 as “Antoinette Edwards Fierce Advocate Day” in Portland.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz said Edwards was “inspiring,” and Commissioner Nick Fish expressed gratitude to her for “being a role model.”

The emotion in the air was evident when Wheeler read the city’s proclamation aloud as Edwards’ husband, Keith, shed tears of joy.

Edwards said she was “in gratitude for the love. I feel the love.” In her closing remarks she addressed the city directly.

“Portland, we don’t have to make it great again. Just keep it good and make it better...my parting words for the community, beloved community: we are so much stronger together,” she said.

Edwards was known for inviting in and getting buy ins from ex-gang members who have turned a new leaf and re-integrated back into the community to participate in the round table discussions, with some even being hired to perform youth outreach for those in gangs or on the cusp of adopting the lifestyle, in order to prevent them from continuing in activities that promote violence.



PHOTO BY ADAM THOMPSON/THE OFFICE OF MAYOR TED WHEELER
Antoinette Edwards, a tireless community advocate and the director of Portland’s Office of Youth Violence Prevention retired last week. The City Council honored her by proclaiming July 31 as “Antoinette Edwards Fierce Advocate Day” in Portland.

The office more broadly advanced trauma informed care to create a space for healing. Edwards was thanked for being the change agent to make that possible.

Edwards told the Portland Observer she was “humbled beyond words” by the proclamation and attributed the honor to the power of community.

“I’ve had the opportunity to work with people and their grief with trauma, losing loved ones to gun violence... from being wounded to using their wisdom to help others... If it wasn’t for community, I wouldn’t be here.”

She added she’ll “never retire from the community,” but is looking forward to spending more time with her grandkids and husband.

Edwards served four mayors during her tenure with the city. She received multiple awards for her advocacy, including the Gladys McCoy Citizen Involvement Award from the Citizen Involvement Committee of Multnomah County in 2009, the 2013 Social Justice Fund Northwest Jeannette Rankin Award, and the 2015 Equity Foundation’s Women Who Lead Award.

Former Candidate Hired by District

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and Engagement team.

“I ran for the board because of my deep commitment to advocating for racial equity and social justice in our public schools and creating deep opportunity for our community to be involved. My new role will allow me to braid the knowledge and experiences of our community to re-imagine PPS,” Clarke said.

A career educator who is originally from Jamaica, Clarke is joining Portland’s largest school district after helping to launch and run a resource center for black students at PSU aimed at supporting their continued education and elevating their voices, called the Pan-African Resource Center.

In her bid for school board, Clarke ran on a platform of incorporating a holistic approach to education, including doing crisis intervention and focusing on improving systems to address students’ needs. She cited an audit of Portland Public Schools by Oregon Secretary of State’s office showing dramatic shortcomings in outcomes for students of color in the district as helping to inform her on the needs.

Clarke holds a Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership from University of Northern Colorado where she studied culturally responsive pedagogy and researched better ways of serving diverse students.

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