



# Portland Observer

Established in 1970

Volume XLVIII • Number 39



www.portlandobserver.com  
Wednesday • October 2, 2019



Committed to Cultural Diversity



PHOTO BY BEVERLY CORBELL/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Board members of the newly formed Black American Chamber of Commerce gather at historic Union Station for a meeting to adopt bylaws. The board members pictured are Theo Cason (from left), Jesse Hyatt, Lené Hopson, E.D. Mondaine, John Tolbert and Antjuan Tolbert. Not pictured are board members Margo Bryant and E.D. Owens.

## New Front for Economic Growth

### Black Chamber of Commerce fills a void

BY BEVERLY CORBELL  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

When the Oregon Department of Justice ordered the disbanding of the African American Chamber of Commerce, headed by Roy Jay, it left a void for business interests in Portland's black community. Jay was investigated for embezzlement but the case ended in a settlement and no charges were brought against him. He was ordered,

however, to close down several nonprofits, including the chamber.

Now a new chamber has been formed, the Black American Chamber of Commerce, which promises to provide resources, scholarships and assistance to its members.

John Tolbert, executive director of the new group, said it was formed to preserve the integrity of the black economic community.

"We are bringing a professional image to the forefront to help us build a coalition of businesses so we can have one voice and help build one another up," he said.

Prosper Portland, the city's economic development arm, helped get the new chamber launched, Tolbert said, and the chamber board is in the process of setting up shop, which means adopting bylaws, hiring staff and looking for funding.

"Hopefully we'll get going in 2020 and we have a lot in place, including grants to get funding in place," he said.

The chamber is looking for new members, Tolbert said, and will offer many services.

"We want to be able to showcase our members to provide networking and business solutions," he said. "We are also very interested in education, including scholarships and trade schools, and we want to be in all sectors, in travel and in transportation departments."

The city has already given a helping hand to Theo Cason, owner of Cason's Fine Meats and another charter board member for the new chamber.

Cason said he previously had "landlord issues" and had to close his store for a whole year. But thanks to refinancing help from Prosper Portland, he was able to open a new location at Alberta Commons on the corner of Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Alberta Street. The retail block was recently constructed as he second half of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4