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PHOTO BY BEVERLY CORBELL/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
John Tolbert (left) is executive director of the newly formed Black American Chamber of Commerce and Jesse Hyatt is chamber president.

New Front for Economic Growth

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

“We will do cross marketing, expand our world and hope to attract new members,” he said.

Hyatt is the founder of Hyatt and Associates, and Tolbert is general manager of Po’Shines. Other members of the new chamber board are Lené Hopson, senior administrative coordinator at Prosper Portland; Margo Bryant of Portland General Electric; E.D. Owens of Amazing Glass; E.D. Mondaine, president of the Portland NAACP; and his assistant Antjuan Tolbert of Emphyrean Perspectives. Hopson points out that she is not representing Prosper Portland on the board, but serves as a volunteer community member.

“My wife didn’t want me to open and wanted me to stay retired,” Cason said. “But I did it for the neighborhood and the community’s sake.”

Cason said he fully supports the new chamber’s mission of education, and says it’s important to pass on skills like his to young people.

“You can be successful if you just learn a skill or trade,” he said.

Tolbert said that as the economy “continues to do what it’s doing,” the city needs to support and encourage mom and pop stores like Cason’s.

“We want to make sure people of color have opportunities in some of the funding through the city and Prosper Portland, to create financial opportunities so we can get the money we need to expand,” he said.

Chamber president Jesse Hyatt said the board hopes to expand the new chamber through weekly Thursday morning meetings.

Mondaine said he’s glad to serve on the board and hopes to promote more inclusiveness for African Americans in the economic sector.

“We must be a voice of access for entrepreneurial interests,” he said. “We must be stakeholders in the Oregon economy. We want to create an ambiance of people representing the community from the oldest to the youngest.”

To learn more about the Black American Chamber of Commerce and keep up with developments at the new group, log online to blackamericanchamber.org.

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