

Portland Observer's 50 Years

Anniversary renews focus on Black, diverse communities

BY BEVERLY CORBELL
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

For 50 years, the Portland Observer has endeavored to inform and uplift the African American and other communities of color. With informed local reporting, photography, columns and articles dedicated to diversity and the Black experience, the

publication is celebrating the past with a pledge to continue delivering solid news to our readers and viewers in the future. As the state's oldest Black-owned newspaper, the Portland Observer plans to carry on that proud tradition for many years to come.

Like other Black-owned businesses, 2020 has been a rough year. Because of the restric-

tions imposed by the coronavirus, a stay-at-home order, and managing a fall from revenues, Portland Observer Publisher Mark Washington needed to take steps to reduce costs. He moved the publication to every other week and cut staff hours, but now says support is picking up and he expects to survive this crisis.

The Portland Observer as a current, on-going publication was started in 1970 by Rev. Alfred L. Henderson of Portland's Bethel AME Church, and was taken over by Washington's mother, the late Joyce Washington in the 1980s.

Joyce worked for Henderson in those early years as a successful saleswoman, but when he couldn't afford to pay her commission, she came up with a novel scheme to take over the paper herself and keep it going.

"She was a salesperson but he couldn't afford to pay her and fell behind on his taxes," Washington said. "So she made a deal to pay off the taxes and take over ownership."

Before coming to the Portland Observer, Joyce had been deeply involved in social services, holding a high level position with Adult Family Services, Washington said, and she brought that philosophy of helping others to her leadership of the paper.

"She had a vision of wanting to help



Portland had its own civil rights movement when the Portland Observer came into publication 50 years ago. Portland's Black Panther Party, for example, started as a group of young African Americans who read Malcolm X and Mao Tse-tung. A photo from Feb. 14, 1970 shows Sandra Ford picketing in support of repressed peoples at the U.S. Courthouse, downtown. (Oregon Historical Society photo)



The Portland Observer, born in 1970, traces its beginnings to a need to cover issues from the African American community's perspective when previous Black publications ceased to exist. The photo above is an example of the turmoil the community was facing at the time, as two young African American men get arrested by white police officers while surrounded by a crowd. (Oregon Historical Society photo)

the community since she had been doing so much with social services and welfare," he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

Powering cultural diversity

Congratulations to The Portland Observer for 50 years of celebrating cultural diversity within our community and bringing important news and local insight to our area.

All of us at Pacific Power are inspired by the Observer's connection and commitment to the community and look forward to their next 50 years. We carry their spirit of inclusion as we serve our customers and communities of color and work to deliver the safest, most sustainable, affordable and reliable power possible. Find out more at pacificpower.net.

PACIFIC POWER
POWERING YOUR GREATNESS