

# Diversifying the Construction Industry

## Honored for economic empowerment

Michael Burch, a member of Portland's Black community who serves as a labor representative, was recently honored for his work to bring economic opportunities to minority and disadvantaged populations.

Burch was recognized as a trailblazer leader who personifies the Urban League of Portland's mission of equal opportunity when he was the guest of honor during the nonprofit's annual Equal Opportunity Day Awards event on Sept. 23. He was credited with being a community activist, a relationship builder, organizer, problem solver and ambassador.

The native Portlander, raised in a diverse neighborhood of northeast Portland with two siblings, is the community relations and outreach representative for the Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters.

A profile of Burch's life was presented as part of the Urban League celebration:

Burch came to adulthood during the Vietnam War when the draft took lots of young men from his neighborhood



Michael Burch

and those returning were often seriously injured or in body bags. Instead of waiting to be drafted, he signed up for the Air Force Reserves. After 8 months on active duty, he spent the next six years as an Air Evacuation Specialist.

Immediately after active duty he enrolled at the University of Oregon and spent the next five years earning a bachelor's degree in psychology and attending law school for one year. After college he worked a variety of jobs with increasing frustration because of

the lack of opportunities or upward mobility available to young Black men.

All his life Burch had been told education was the key to success and the doorway to opportunity. As it turned out, those opportunities were very limited and, mostly not extended to educated Black men in Portland in the late 70's. After a decade of attempting to prove his worth to a variety of employers, he decided to try a career move to something that fed his spirit instead of his pocket.

Most of this new career placed him in an alternative school setting serving low-income youth ages 16-25 years of age. After 16 years he left that setting and began his career with the Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters.

Burch sits on two Joint Apprenticeship & Training Councils for the Regional Council. He also serves on several boards and commissions representing the Carpenters efforts to diversify the construction industry, including Portland YouthBuilders, Constructing Hope, All Hands Raised, Metropolitan Alliance for Workforce Equity, Fair Contracting Forum and the Oregon State Apprenticeship and Training Council.

In his spare time, he spends time with friends, fishing, drag racing, some off-roading and hanging out with his daughters and four grandchildren.



Jennifer Yruegas

## Women Business Leaders Honored

### Mentoring and supporting advancement

An esteemed college dean who also serves as a faculty member and attorney for Pacific University, and two Portland area firms, have been recognized for their efforts to mentor

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