

# 'PDX People of Color' Brings Group Outdoors

## Local Group Received \$75,000 Grant from Adidas

By BEVERLY CORBELL

When Portland native Pamela Slaughter was a little girl, she loved the outdoors and spent a lot of time exploring city parks and nearby woods.

"My mother loved nature," she said. "My five siblings and I had lots of wonderful walks and picnics in beautiful settings, thanks to my mother."

Years later, she tried to bring the same love of nature to her own children, until one day on a trail they were threatened by another group on the trail.

"Coming towards us, with shaved heads, steel toed boots, Confederate flag patches and hateful scowls, was a group of racist skinheads," she recounted on her website, [pdxpocoutdoors.com](http://pdxpocoutdoors.com).

"I told my children to walk with me a few feet off the path to let them pass without contact, but they followed us off the path and surrounded us," she wrote. "I couldn't tell you what they said, because my mind was completely occupied with how to keep my children safe."

About that time, other hikers came along, and the skinheads moved on, but it left Slaughter no longer feeling safe on Portland's many trails. So, she took a different strategy until her children grew up.

"We stuck to group activities and did a lot of volunteer work after that, even though we were usually the only Black family present," she said, but their presence was usually tolerated rather than welcomed.

Years later, as a grandmother and great aunt, she saw her grandson and nephews were still

experiencing racism in natural spaces. So, she vowed to do something about it, and contacted the national group Outdoor Afro and went to their training retreat in Virginia, where she learned to lead events safely.

Then, in 2017, she started a Meetup group for people of color, which eventually became People of Color Outdoors. Since then, POCO has hosted more than 350 events that include hiking, trail running, biking, camping, canoeing, fishing, bird watching, rock climbing and much more.

Fast forward to May of last year, when Slaughter entered the Black Ambition Contest, sponsored by singer-songwriter and rapper, Pharrell Williams. She gave a pitch on People of Color Outdoors and won a prize of \$1,000, she said, which led her to giving another pitch to the Adidas company, and was awarded \$75,000 to keep POCO going.

"The Adidas grant made a huge difference," she said. "Because of Adidas I was able to pay rent for my office and further our goals."

Slaughter also sought to increase her own knowledge and took classes in entrepreneurship and digital photography, and she's now taking a class in finance. Her daughter, Ashley Slaughter, has also helped by acting as a part-time paid program manager, and by managing social media like Instagram and Tik Tok, things Pamela wasn't familiar with, which has been a big help, thanks in part to Adidas funding.

Slaughter's next goal is to buy some property with for a retreat center where people can gain more training about the natural world.

With that in mind, on May 15, Slaughter will make another pitch to Adidas to fund the retreat center.

"It's what I've had in my head for years, to have a space where people of color can go and learn and picnic and not feel like they



photo credit to Pamela Slaughter

have to look over their shoulder, and at the same time learn about other cultures," she said.

People of Color Outdoors became a nonprofit in 2020 and the group has grown enormously since then. By 2019 POCO had 495 members, and by the end of 2020 membership had grown to thousands.

POCO is always looking for sponsors and donations. Cash

is welcome, but camping gear, binoculars, bird guides, new sleeping bags (for children and adults) and other equipment including headlamps, lanterns and flashlights are needed.

The Columbia Slough Watershed Council, a fiscal sponsor of POCO, also asks on its website for donations to the nonprofit, citing its many benefits.

"People of Color Outdoors is

founded on the belief that having regular access to nature is something that all people should be able to do safely and free from intimidation fear or feeling unwelcome because of their color."


To learn more about People of Color Outdoors, visit their website or find them at [www.meetup.com/pro/people-of-color-outdoors](http://www.meetup.com/pro/people-of-color-outdoors) or [www.facebook.com/groups/pdxpoco](http://www.facebook.com/groups/pdxpoco).



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