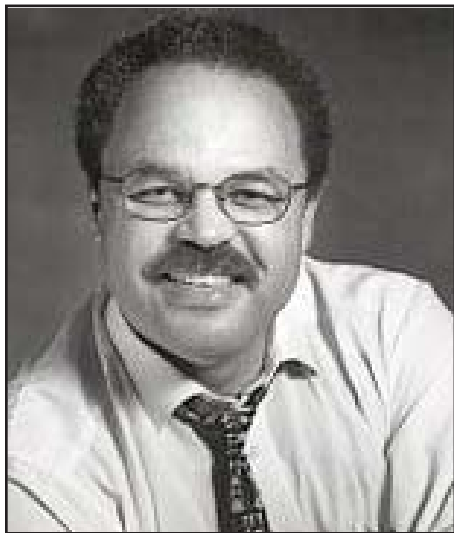


## Contracts

continued from page 1

reaching Portland's minority communities. Faye Burch, who held Myer's job during former Gov. Barbara Roberts' administra-



State Rep. Lew Frederick

tion says ODOT has not done enough to remedy the disparities.

"All I am hearing is: 'We're not getting work'," she said. "Money is not coming into the African American community.

"ODOT had \$45 million to achieve their DBE (disadvantaged businesses enterprise) goals. They say they met their goal, but our largest African American firm in the Portland region has had just \$30,000 in work."

Michael Cobb, director of ODOT's office of civil rights, says not only do the figures show progress, but the department has put a raft of support services in place specifically to help Black and Asian contractors secure contracts.

"Matt Garrett (State Transportation Department director) always acknowledges that ODOT has a terrible history and we must do better," Cobb says. "But we are doing better. We are seeing those numbers climbing steadily. They are not where we want them to be, but they are rising incrementally."

What is ODOT Doing for Equity?

The agency has partnered with the Turner School of Construction, with Community Colleges and with business development centers across the state to help train smaller firms.

"We have programs in place to build small businesses so they can build up to doing the kind of work ODOT does, which is not the same as working on buildings; it is heavy duty highway construction. We have graduated about 30 firms a year for the last four or five years."

Cobb said ODOT now pulls smaller contracts (less than \$150,000 for professional services; and less than \$100,000 for construction) out of the large highway projects, for distribution to small businesses. Paperwork to register with the state has been reduced to eight pages – slim by federal standards, he says. ODOT also runs a mentoring program.

James Faison, who owns a Portland-based concrete company is in ODOT's mentoring program. He said he would recommend it to other contractors because it might help them grow. Unlike many other minority firms,

You can't bill until you've worked for 30 days, then they have 30 days to pay you and the general contractor has 10 more days.

Faison runs a union shop, where he employs between six to 12 masons. He subcontracts ODOT work from bigger firms. Faison said ODOT's mentoring program is beginning to

take shape, after some months of uncertainty. He thinks the agency is moving in the right direction, but some policies should be changed. There's so much red tape, he says, it's hard to figure out. Payment too is a sore spot.

"You don't get paid until 60 or 70 days after you start work," he says. "You can't

ODOT had \$45 million to achieve their DBE (disadvantaged businesses enterprise) goals. They say they met their goal, but our largest African American firm in the Portland region has had just \$30,000 in work

bill until you've worked for 30 days, then they have 30 days to pay you and the general contractor has 10 more days. That's a killer for a small business. Sometimes the general will pay quicker because they want to help, but ODOT won't."

Do The Numbers Reflect The Problem?

Burch, who helped found the Oregon branch of the National Association of Minority Contractors, runs her own project management and consulting business. She takes issue with the state's numbers, arguing that the disparity data is flawed because it only applies to prime contractors and the Tier 1 sub-contractors who work directly for the primes.

One or two Black-owned firms in Portland perform \$10 to 12 million dollars of work a year and could take on those roles, Burch said. However, the majority of the work will be further parceled out to sub-contractors who work further down the chain.

"That's where most of us are," she says. "The problems are in the sub-tiers. But they don't look at anyone below the first tier."

Burch said she dug into one project where ODOT had sub-contracted with an African American-owned trucking firm. That entire contract was credited as going to an African American business, she says. Yet, in reality, that contractor did not invite any African Americans to his pre-bid conference and awarded most of his sub-contracts to firms owned by white males.

Courts Require Compelling Evidence of Discrimination

Minority contractors across the nation have struggled to get a fair share of state transportation work. In Missouri, for example, in July 2009 Black contractors stopped traffic on I70 to protest being squeezed out of stimulus contracts. Just 12 percent of the limited transportation dollars slated for disadvantaged businesses had gone to minority firms, with the remaining 88 percent contracted to women-owned firms.

Eddie Rye, a Seattle-based radio host, is a longtime advocate for African Americans in construction. "Just look at the utilization reports for Washington," he said. "When



Faye Burch

you see all the minorities together are doing 1 percent – or less – of the work, that's tragic." The Skanner News Video: Eddie Rye

A Ninth Circuit Court ruling stopped all the states in its jurisdiction, including

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### COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## PORTLAND JANUARY 2011

### BULLETIN BOARD



If you have an event you want to share with the community, email it two weeks in advance to *The Skanner* at [info@theskanner.com](mailto:info@theskanner.com)

Thursday February 3

TELLING STORIES: THE ART OF FACT AN EXHIBIT OF

WORKS BY DAN PILLERS: Opening reception 6 – 8 p.m. 4115 N. Mississippi Ave. Art Exhibit at the Q. This exhibit runs until Feb. 27

LEGO SWAP MEET! Buy, sell, trade, build Legos. Door prizes, consignment table. Bring your own Legos to show. Adults \$2 children 5-12 \$1. 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. Pacific Crest Grand Ballroom 610 McLoughlin Blvd.

Friday February 4

NATIONAL WEAR RED DAY! The American Heart Assoc. asks women – and the men who love them to show their support for the fight against heart disease in women.

Saturday February 5

LLOYD CENTER DEBUTS LEGACY FUNLAND CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA: A one-of-a kind children's

soft structure play area on the lower level of the mall. Lloyd Center and Legacy Health will host a grand opening celebration from noon until 4 p.m.

FREE DENTAL CARE OFFERED FOR UNINSURED CHILDREN! Children's Dental Health Day is from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Clark College Dental Hygiene Clinic 1933 FT. Vancouver Way. Children will be seen by appointment only please call 360-397-8000 ext 7371.

FREE HEALTH SCREENING FOR VASCULAR CONDITION: Free health screening to detect vascular condition will be offered for Portland-area residents. 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Kmart Pharmacy 7655 Nyberg Rd. Advance registration required please call 866-371-3592. Screenings take 10 minutes.

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