

Students a Standing Ovation at POIC Work Opportunities Breakfast

Business leaders offer support at MAC club

By Helen Silvis
Of *The Skanner News*

Portland Opportunities Industrial Center drew a crowd of supporters to Portland's MAC club April 5, for its annual Work Connections Breakfast. It was an opportunity for the high school and career mentoring nonprofit to showcase its work.

Business leaders, including contingents from Intel, Nike and Oregon Live turned out in force and gave a standing ovation to two students receiving CARE Role model awards.

POIC also recognized two community advocates: Janine Clayton of the Gifford Pinchot Forest Service and Portland Mayor Sam Adams.

The Emcee for the event was former NBA point guard and coach Michael Holton. Holton said he had learned about the school and its innovative programs through his friendship with Joe McFerrin, POIC's President and CEO.

"When he started explaining to me his passion for creating opportunities for youth I knew I wanted to be part of that," Holton said. Holton said when he was in third grade, his own parents divorced. His mother told him she was happy because the judge had "awarded" him to her. While he didn't know what that meant, the very next day he approached two business owners and asked for work.

"If my dad was not going to be there I

thought I should have a job," he said. Those business owners, Ms. Johnson and Mr. Friday, gave him small tasks, spare change and a huge dose of encouragement.

"When I reached out to those business owners, they were there," Holton said. "I knew I could be a business owner from third grade on. And what I am challenging you to do is to give that gift of encouragement to another life. The gift of encouragement is the most important gift we can give one another."

Multnomah County Chair, Jeff Cogen, said POIC has helped more than 800 youth through the Rosemary Anderson High School, college prep and mentoring programs. Many of those students have dropped out of school by the time they reach POIC, and all of them have an uphill climb to graduate. POIC helps its students through the age of 25.

"POIC doesn't give up on any of our young men and women," Cogen said. POIC helps hundreds of our community's children on a daily basis."

More than 90 percent of students at the school are from low-income families and get free or reduced school meals.

Joe McFerrin, CEO and president of the nonprofit, said the students are talented and have a wide range of interests. What they don't have is the extended family and friend's connections that can help them launch careers.

"Eighty percent of jobs are not advertised," he said. "Businesses are relying

Equity Reception



PHOTO BY LISALOVING

Portland's new director of the Bureau of Equity, Dante James, at right, was celebrated at a City Hall reception last Friday afternoon. James, who hails from Colorado, now faces the job of building the bureau itself, from its operations base to its staff and City Hall relationships.

more and more on their workforce connections when they hire.

"A kid with parents who are working poor, with no extended family connections has no place to start, and no chance. At POIC we are that extended family network. We're the life skills coaches, the mentors; we're the ones who pick them up when they fall."

Four people received CARE awards:

Janine Clayton of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest was recognized with a

CARE Advocate award, for hiring and mentoring students. Receiving the award on behalf of her staff, Clayton said I was a privilege to be involved with POIC and quoted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "Life's most persistent and urgent question is 'What are you doing for others?'"

Mayor Sam Adams also was recognized with a CARE Advocate award.

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