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Bail Out Regular People?

Merkley launches new idea to help homeowners in crisis

By Helen Silvis
Of The Skanner News

When Rev. Fredi Jackson bought her home in the East Portland, in 2009, she could easily afford the mortgage. But after her renters moved out, paying became more difficult. She tried to refinance and was approved for a short-term modification. Since then, she's been trying to get a permanent loan modification. Now, more than a year later, she says, her bank—Bank of America—just keeps stalling.



Rev. Fredi Jackson and Sen Jeff Merkley

Sen. Jeff Merkley held a press conference outside Jackson's house, Friday, to highlight the continuing struggles of millions of U.S. homeowners stuck in high interest mortgages, and to offer his solution.

"We moved so boldly as a nation to help out large Wall Street institutions," Sen. Merkley said. "We should move equally boldly to help out families across America."

Merkley's proposal calls on Congress to take aggressive action to reduce the impact of the housing crisis, by creating a trust, the Rebuilding American Homeownership Trust, that would refinance mortgages at

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BIG FLOAT



PHOTO BY LISA LOVING

More than 1,400 people climbed into the Willamette River last Sunday for the Big Float 2, a local event designed to encourage Portlanders to "take back" their river. After completion of the Big Pipe sewer project last winter, city officials say the water quality is better than it's been in more than a hundred years. Participants agreed; a Guinness World Record for longest floating human chain failed for technical reasons, but the number of people who formed the chain—more than 850—whipped the current record of just 580. Organizers say they'll try again next year.

Felesia Otis on Mental Illness

Keaton's mother spreads the word on recovery from psychosis

Helen Silvis
Of The Skanner News

Felesia Otis says it's hard to pinpoint the moment when her son Keaton became mentally ill. As a Benson High School student he had lots of friends and loved life.

Keaton was artistic, interested in photography, graphic design and poetry. After leaving school, he designed and produced t-shirts and jackets. He also lived with cousins in Canada, for a couple of years.

Eventually, he planned to go college and get a degree. But gradually, in his early 20s he slipped into psychosis.

"He could do all the normal things—he could go to the store. By the time we realized he was starting to lose touch with reality, and he was going to need some help, he'd been struggling for some time."

Keaton had always had a suspicious streak, Otis says. The family would even tease him about it. But from an endearing character trait, Keaton's suspi-

cion morphed into paranoia. He began to spend more and more time alone in his room, even avoiding friends and family.

He would worry if a strange car parked across the street, or if anyone came to the door.

"It was subtle little things. We'd dismiss it as just Keaton being a little paranoid," Otis says.

Because Keaton was talking less and less, it took a long time before his family realized he believed people were tunneling under the family home and spy-

ing on them.

"The more unsafe he felt and the more anxious he was, the worse his delusions got," Otis says. "As a family member, you're just in shock because it's not rational for your child to believe that."

"He wouldn't see his aunts and uncles; he wouldn't see anybody. He had really changed," Otis says. "He stopped talking. He wouldn't say much more than a sentence. It's like you don't recognize

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'Intersection Mural' for North Portland

The painted art would complement shooting victim shrine

Inspired by the City Repair project, artist Kymberly Jeka wanted to create a community mural on her street. The intersection of North Haight and Emerson streets, she thought, would be an ideal spot to paint a street mural. The idea behind intersection murals is to bring community members together to reclaim urban streets as gathering places.

The shooting of DeAndre Clark, on Octo-

ber 21, 2011, just steps away from the intersection, simply strengthened Jeka's determination to move the project forward.

"There's a shrine there, where people light candles for DeAndre," she says. "What an opportunity to make some beauty here, instead of just that loss."

Jeka took her idea and a picture of the proposed design to every neighbor within two blocks of the intersection. Everyone signed.

She also visited business owners, the Salvation Army, the Chapel Pub, and received encouragement from everyone she spoke to. Jeka hopes that the Jefferson High School students who cross the intersection every day will want to help paint the mural. So she took her design and petition to Jefferson too.

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