

Cherry Hendrix Celebrates Centennial Birthday

By Gail Johnson

Cherry Charity Hendrix celebrated her 100th birthday with family, church members and friends at the June Key Delta Community Center Sunday Aug. 19.

Cherry Hendrix was born in Hope Hull, Ala., on Aug. 17, one hundred years ago. During World War 11 she accepted an invitation from a cousin in Portland to relocate here. She came all by herself, leaving her young son Joe with her mother until she found work. She arrived on a Sunday and found work in the Vanport Shipyard by Friday.

The establishment of Vanport coincided with an unprecedented influx of African Americans into Oregon. The state had a population of fewer than 1,200 blacks in 1940, but by 1946 over 13,000 lived in the Portland area, mostly in Van-

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PHOTO BY REBA ALLMON PHOTOGRAPHY



Cherry Charity Hendrix

the Metropolitan Family Service Experience Corporation program. Metropolitan Family Service established the Cherry Hendrix Initiative Award in her honor.

In February 2007 Cherry made the front page of the Portland Tribune with an article about her extraordinary volunteer work. She was honored by the Trailblazers at half time for her volunteer service when she retired. In spite of all the awards and accolades she remains humble and God-centered.

Judy Strand, CEO, Metropolitan Family Service was a speaker at the birthday celebration. Mrs. Strand told the story of offering Cherry the opportunity to meet President Bill Clinton on a Sunday morning when he was in town. Cherry thanked her very much but said she was sorry she could not attend because she had to usher at church on that Sunday. She did get another opportunity to meet the President and his daughter when they visited the school.

The children and grandchildren told stories of Cherry being a wonderful mother and disciplinarian in spite of being a single parent.

Senior Pastor Haynes from Allen Temple Church, where

she has been a member for over 50 years, was also a guest speaker. The former principal of Woodlawn Elementary School, Mr. Lemil Speed, shared some funny stories of her commitment to the student's needs even when there was no money for extras. She always got the money she requested. She was affectionately known to the children in school and church as Grandma Cherry.

Cherry received a birthday card from President and First Lady Obama, many personal messages for her memory book, gifts and cards from guests at the celebration. Many adults who Cherry taught as children now have children and grandchildren who come to her and told her how they remember her and thank her for teaching them to read.

Cherry, an avid reader, found that she could travel, explore exotic places, and do anything she wanted through

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books. This quote from Cherry best exemplifies her love of reading: "When I read a book, it's like someone is talking to me." Cherry didn't just read, but she lived out the wonderment of life she read about daily. She took what she learned in those books, countless crosswords, and word search puzzles and made them a reality, sharing her love of books with countless children and their children.

After all the festivities concluded Cherry said, "I am so overwhelmed with the love I have been shown today. When I die there will be no need for a funeral. Many have received showers of love and comments of adoration when they die, but I have been blessed enough to be here to hear it."

Congratulations on 100 years of service and life.

port and other segregated housing districts.

On her second day of work Cherry caught the bus to go home and every seat was taken except the seat next to a young man from Louisiana. He had purposely held a seat for her. Jerome Hendrix or Shorty as he was affectionately called worked in the shipyard as a welder. They talked during the bus ride home and he asked for her address so that he could come and visit her. Cherry gave him the wrong number but Shorty was determined and found her that same night. They were married a few months later. Two girls were added to the family, Elona and Doris.

The lives of Cherry, Shorty and everyone who lived in Vanport were changed forever on May 29, 1948. The only signal they had was a man with a bullhorn shouting, "The dike has broken." Joe, who was out throwing papers, heard the warning and raced home. They threw a few clothes, blankets, and Joe's record player into a trunk and left. Cars were lined up on Denver Street to get out when Joe told Shorty to drive on the opposite side of the road and they just made it out.

Shorty left his beloved Cherry in November 1968 and Cherry became a single parent and went to work again. Cherry worked at King Elementary School for 5 years and at Jason Lee Elementary School for 6 years as a teacher's aid for reading. After her retirement at age 77, she volunteered through the Experience Corporation in 1990 as a reading aide at Woodlawn Elementary School. She continued to work with the children until she was 97.

In 2004 Cherry was awarded the Neighborhood Excellence Initiative Local Hero Award by Bank of America for

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