

Park

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Joe Nunn, a longtime community resident whose words contribute to the story etched into the boulders, said the park always was a popular gathering place after church.

"I especially like the playground because parks are about children and the playground is excellent," he said. "You don't have to worry about them falling in the playground because you have artificial turf and it's real soft. I also like the fact that they have kept the tables for the older men who have come here for years and years to pay checkers and other board games."

A grand re-opening celebration Wednesday will include a concert by the R&B band Ocean 503, part of the city's sum-

'What we're looking at here is a major renovation of an incredibly historic park'

mer Concerts in the Park series. Dawson Park will also host concerts on July 23 and 30. Starting at 5:30 p.m., the celebration will feature: free health checks and CPR training; a bicycle helmet sale, with \$6 helmets; and speeches from Portland Parks Commissioner Nick Fish; Legacy Emanuel Medical Center's chief administrative officer, Lori Morgan; Parks director Mike Abbate; Portland Development Commission director, Patrick Quinton; and Urban League of Portland president Mike Alexander.

The City of Portland, Legacy Emanuel Medical Center, the Regional Arts and Culture Council collaborated with community members to create the project. Quinton said the renovation used one of the most diverse crews in the commission's history.

"We were able to achieve an 89 percent utilization rate of minority women and small contractors — almost unprecedented in terms of public construction projects," he said. "This is a model that we believe we can use in other community projects and it's a model that we are committed to continuing to use."

Creating the circular walkway was one of the biggest challenges. Workers had to dig trenches around tree roots by hand, to safeguard the park's 40-plus trees.

Before the renovation bushes and dark corners made pedestrians think twice before entering after sunset. Now the open vista and bright energy-efficient lighting means parents can see their children from across the park. That's a big safety improvement, Taylor said.

"It wasn't very kid friendly. One thing I worried about when they opened this park back up is if we were going to see people hanging out drinking or doing negative things. But I haven't seen it at all."

The history of Portland's African American community is



PHOTO BY HELEN SILVIA

After a \$2.7 million makeover, Dawson Park on North Williams Avenue between Stanton and Morris in Northeast Portland has reopened with a new playground, a fountain, signs that tell the history of the park and a new open plan vista.

integral to the park's story. This part of Northeast Portland, the Albina neighborhood, was in the heart of that community. The neighborhood was also called Jumptown because of its jazz clubs and vibrant nightlife. And because of a banking practice known as redlining, Black Portlanders could buy a home here although they could not get loans to buy anywhere else in the city.

But in the 1950s more than 400 homes on the East bank of the Willamette River were demolished to make way for Memorial Coliseum. And in the 1960s more than 1000 homes and businesses went away to make way for the I5 freeway and the expansion of Emanuel Medical Center. The impact on Portland's small and vulnerable African American community is hard to overstate.

Displacement, research suggests, creates a characteristic pattern of family and economic breakdown similar to that seen in refugee groups across the world. When crack was introduced to this community in the 1980s the problems grew. Tragically more displacement was to follow in the next decades as the neighborhood gentrified and communities of color were pushed east.

Today the city has adopted different development policies, designed to support small businesses and help low-income communities thrive in place. Dawson Park is designed to honor the past as well as continue to be a center for cultural exchange.

"It's a much different park than the park I grew up in," Nunn says. "There are so many people of all colors in this neighborhood now. It's fantastic to see this neighborhood revitalized."

Donny Adair, another longtime resident who worked on the project says the park's new design will help in healing the neighborhood.

"It means a lot to me have this park reconditioned," Adair says. "We grew up in it and it was a great place to come to have a great time, stay off the streets stay out of trouble and develop a lot of skills, camaraderie, communication skills, those kinds of things...It's a great neighborhood park. I had a great time growing up here and I just want many more kids to have that experience."

Corrections

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put out for a competitive interviewing process."

Taylor, as well as Seattle community organizer Eddie Rye Jr., underscored Washington's Initiative 200 — passed in 1998, it prohibited use of racial quotas in hiring — as the culprit in the bad job numbers.

"Since I-200 passed in 1998, a lot of people in government are taking to state law to be law of the land," Rye said Wednesday. "I've heard public officials say we don't have to hire blacks any longer because of I-200. We don't have to promote blacks because of I-200. We don't have to contract with blacks — and if you look at the state's contracts from 2013 less than 1 percent went to white women and all minorities."

Rye went further in criticizing Washington State Corrections Secretary Bernard Warner as well as Gov. Jay Inslee, who he said have been unresponsive to community meetings for the past several years.

"With the department of corrections, out of 40 people, you have one minority in the top administrators, and people are going and getting positions without any competition, no job announcement and the secretary is doing as he damn well pleases.

"And he's doing it in violation of title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

"Folks in this state have to understand that I-200 does not supersede the 1964 Civil Rights Act," Rye said.

"One of the things to that is evident is that Initiative 200 inspires these types of decisions, explicitly or implicitly — it's the notion that you don't have to create oppor-

state, and federal governments," Taylor says.

"And to use those dollars — I can tell you that 75-80 percent of our budget in the City of Renton goes to wages and benefits — to use those dollars to exclude people of color is wrong."

The group gathered this week to call for a federal investigation of corrections hiring

Quasim, Seattle Black Firefighter Association President Roberto Jourdan, Black Dollar Days Task Force Executive Director Robert L. Jeffrey, Sr.; Tacoma NAACP President Rev. Gregory Christopher; Northwest NAACP Vice President Sheley Secret; Seattle University School of Law Professor Henry McGee; Washington State Black Christian Clergy President Rev. Lawrence R. Willis; and Rye of the Community Coalition for Contracts and Jobs.

"That's why we went directly to the attorney general — we've talked to the governor for the last couple of years, we've been in meetings with the secretary, but obviously the meetings mean nothing to the governor or the secretary because there's been no changes," Rye said.

"The thing about it is that you have a lot of people that have come together behind this very important issue, and this is just the tip of the iceberg.

"This discrimination is happening all across the state, and that's why we went to the US attorney because it's a violation of federal law."

Renton City Councilor Greg Taylor told The Skanner News that the issue is about improving employment trends for communities of color and holding top state officials accountable for fairer hiring practices

tunities for African Americans or Latinos in the hiring process," Taylor said.

"People of color, they all pay sales tax, gratuity tax, real estate tax, in some form or fashion whether they're buying or not, and those dollars are utilized by local, county,

reads like a who's who of civil rights activism in Washington, including Seattle NAACP president Gerald Hankerson; A Philip Randolph Institute President Verlene Jones; Renton City Councilor Greg Taylor; Tacoma Black Collective co-chair Lyle