

North Portland Couple Celebrated at OHS

Lisa Loving
Of The Skanner News

The North Portland couple who broke Oregon's color line — for bakeries — has been honored by the Oregon Historical Society with a special exhibit commemorating their former business, Milwaukee Pastry Kitchen.

Items illustrating the story of Hurtis Mixon and Dorothy Bishop Butler Hadley, credited with opening Oregon's first black owned and operated bakery, have been installed in a board room at the History Center.

Eventually Hurtis became the first African-American bakery trainer in the state, working for Albertsons and Safeway as well. It was his job to show the ropes to both store directors and prospective bakery employees.

But when he was passed over for a regional management job—told by supervisors that Southern Oregon residents would never accept a black man in a position of authority—he and his wife, who until then worked as a cosmetician, pooled their resources and bought the shuttered Milwaukee Pastry Kitchen in 1977.

The Pastry Kitchen had been run for 22

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The exhibit represents a milestone in marking the achievement of an artisan baker who was prevented from rising in his own field until he and his wife opened their own company.

"It's an important story and people need to know the history," Hurtis says. "A lot of people who are trying to run their own businesses today have no idea what other people have gone through in the past."

Hurtis started as a baker's helper in the early 1960s at Bohemian bakery and restaurants. After several years there — during which he was denied entry to the bakers' union because of his race—he was hired as an apprentice at Albertson's grocery store to become a journeyman baker.

For years afterwards, at Albertson's supermarket chain as well as Safeway, Hadley moved up through the trainee ranks, becoming the first black employee to blaze a trail in everything he did.

years by a white husband and wife team who embraced the Hadleys wholeheartedly and even helped promote the new owners.

The Hadleys say their decision to purchase an existing company was strategic because it already had a steady stream of customers and specialties, which they picked up and improved upon without missing a beat.

While Hurtis was in charge of the baking, Dorothy ran everything else — the sales, the employees, the window displays and more.

The couple was famous for their unique baked items, especially cakes of all kinds, plus pies, breads, donuts, and more.

Particularly popular were the pink champagne "sweet sixteen" birthday cakes, and the banana whipped cream cake.

"Every year Hurtis made a banana whipped cream cake for a woman in New York whose mother was in a care facility in Milwaukie," Dorothy says.



The Oregon Historical Society's exhibit of Hurtis Mixon and Dorothy Bishop Butler Hadley's bakery represents a milestone the achievement of an artisan baker who was prevented from rising in his own field until he and his wife opened their own company.

"He would take it over with birthday hats and decorations and sing happy birthday to her."

Dorothy says that this woman was already a fan of the bakery from the previous owner — but both the previous owner and the birthday customer insisted Hurtis' banana whipped cream cake was the best.

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Skanner News in May of 1977. It described the bakery's 18 varieties of bread, all made without preservatives. But the article singled out the Hadley's whole wheat loaf made with honey that was such a specialty, customers sent it out across the country to their family and friends.

After eight years, the economic downturn of the mid-1980s prompted the Hadleys to

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tis that he went all over Milwaukie telling people Hurtis was a better baker than he was," Dorothy said. "That was an important reason why we were successful from the beginning."

The Milwaukee pastry kitchen became a destination for customers all races—from everyday people to politicians, dignitaries and media celebrities.

The bakery's slogan was, "Put a little soul in your roll."

A feature about the company ran in *The*

close the bakery; they say every other business on their block closed as well.

Hurtis Hadley spent several more years baking at Safeway, Franz, and Orowheat, before retiring.

The Hadleys' Milwaukee Pastry Kitchen exhibit is in the Historical Society's Madison room for the remainder of the year. The display can be seen by request — ask at the visitors' desk.

Find out more about the Oregon Historical Society at www.ohs.org.

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