

Cycling

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his newborn son Andrew, Stephens and other staff in the group's new office space in the Lloyd Center, the activists were modest about their achievement.

But their vision is big enough to include putting East County children on bikes, talking a stand against gang violence, and bringing leadership of color to a predominantly-white nonprofit group in a way that

Major Taylor Bike Club – named for the “fastest man on Earth,” Marshall Walter Taylor (1878-1932) who was the second known African American athlete to win a world championship in any sport (the 1-mile track cycling championship of 1899).

Stephens is a successful corporate entrepreneur and finance officer who grew up riding bikes. Attending the East County

Transforming bikes from a symbol of gentrification to a tool for community empowerment for families that have been pushed out of the city center

resonates across communities.

“What’s beautiful about the bicycle is that it’s a vehicle without walls. It is a vehicle that doesn’t have barriers, and doesn’t keep people out,” Stephens says.

“I see the challenges that we face in our society are complex — I don’t think they allow for a siloed or specialized approach in the way that we seek to address them,” Tetteh — the former manager of Village Produce in New Columbia — says.

“We want to find ways of growing prosperous communities.”

Tetteh is the former shop manager at the Cycling Center, and founded Portland’s

Bikes for Kids event this month rocked his world.

The December Holiday Bike Drive is traditionally one of the splashiest projects the Cycling Center puts on every year. The event brings hundreds of children and their families to the Emanuel Hospital Atrium for a giant party including bikes, helmets, gear and safety training.

The East County bike event at the Rockwood Boys and Girls Club itself marked a sea change in the scope of what the Center does, or at least, where.

The Cycling Center gave away almost 100 bikes and helmets – with safety training



PHOTO CREDIT MELINDA MUISER

and social services — to kids whose families couldn’t otherwise afford it during the best time of the year to ride.

“I was there, and I saw the first kid get his first bike that he ever had,” Stephens says. “And that smile— that joy just meant so much.”

The new “Take Back the Streets” movement that has emerged under the Cycling Center’s umbrella has really captured Portland’s imagination – it is a development that most could only have dreamed of.

“Folks that have been exposed to violence in their communities decided to take a stand

and work within an anti-violence framework to address some of the needs that they saw out there, and that they knew really well because they had experienced,” Tetteh says.

“One of the things that we often forget when we talk about bicycles is that you get a whole host of co-benefits whenever you decide to choose bicycling as the tool or conveyance for any kind of engagement with others,” Tetteh says.

Find out how to connect and get involved at www.communitycyclingcenter.org.

Love

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Make amends with that family member.”

You don’t have to be best friends with your former opponent, he says. But letting go of the hate is good for everyone.

Crittenden knows about pain as well as forgiveness. He first hit the news in 1979 as a crime victim, when he was just nine years old. His mother, Marla Betty Jean Moore was shot five times by a violent boyfriend, who then turned on James. Fortunately the gun was now empty, but the attack sent his mother to hospital for six months, he says, and left him traumatized. To this day, he carries around the newspaper article about the shooting and his mother’s ID card.

Like many children who experience violence, Crittenden tried to be too tough to get hurt again. In his sophomore year at Madi-

son High School he was charged with a gun offense and spent four years in detention. At the time, he says, he had stopped speaking to one of his aunts over a minor disagreement. And while he was locked up,

she died, leaving him sad that he had never made it up with her.

That was more than 20 years ago, and since then, Crittenden has lived a storied life. He worked at Intel for four years before being discovered by the modeling agent John Casablancas. He’s also had acting roles in movies, such as Honeydripper and

Dead by Sunset.

Osteoarthritis has slowed him down, but he still loves acting, he says, and at Halloween he always dresses up as The Joker.

The LOVE Challenge is no joke, howev-

prospects for Black men and boys.

Mayor Hales has supported the initiative through earmarking city internships for Black boys, and assigning staffer Chad Stover to bring together a group of Black youth and adults to work on the issues.

Joe McFerrin, president of Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center, said disparities in educational and life outcomes can be eliminated if everyone works together toward that goal.

“My hope is that through the Black Male Achievement initiative we can bring light to some of the disparities in employment, education and the justice system, so we can bring a community-wide focus across all of our systems and make changes that are sustainable.”

Letting go of the hate is good for everyone

Wage

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The Oregon numbers are not far off the Washington statistics, with average student debt at \$26,639 and credit card debt at \$4,773; the report pegs the underwater mortgage rate in Oregon the same as Washington’s at nearly 20 percent.

The report concludes that a higher minimum wage is not enough, and that officials also need to take steps to:

- Abolish the federal tipped minimum wage (currently at \$2.13 per hour)
- Reinvest in higher education
- Address medical debt acquired before the Affordable Care Act
- Expand Medicaid eligibility
- Regulate payday lending

“I think families are dealing with student loan debt, with medical debt. Families are having some very painful kitchen table conversations,” Mulady says. “This is one way to level the playing field and it’s a basic value that we all cherish – if you work full time you should be able to meet your basic needs and cover your expenses.”

The Job Gap Report appeared to contradict the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis’ quarterly Oregon Economic and Revenue Forecast, which was released on

the same day and was somewhat upbeat even if it seemed to contradict itself.

“In the past nine months, Oregon’s labor force has increased and added back nearly a quarter of the labor force losses it suffered following the financial crisis,” says the Executive Summary. “Even with the stronger job gains, the state’s unemployment rate has remained unchanged in 2014.”

“Along with recent jobs reports showing the strength of Oregon’s manufacturing sector, this forecast provides further evidence that our economy is moving in the right direction,” Gov. John Kitzhaber said Wednesday. “Even as the recovery gains steam, we must continue our focus on family-wage jobs – the types of jobs that are supported through our work with Daimler, Nike, Intel, Boise Cascade and hundreds of businesses large and small throughout the state.”

The most recent revenue forecast from the

Washington State Economic and Revenue Forecast Council, which came out in June, said, “The Washington economy continues to grow slowly, with employment rising in most sectors except aerospace and federal government.”

The community activists say the most pressing need is to cut back the cost of living in the Northwest.

“I think if there are any differences at all from past Job Gap Reports, it’s that the cost of living has obviously gone up,” Huntress says. “Health care costs have gone up, student debt has gone up — wages have gone down as the cost of living has gone up.”

“I mean \$15 an hour is much better than \$9.10, which is the minimum wage in Oregon— but I think we have to look at long-term solutions that not only lift up minimum wages but bring the cost of living down.

“I think that \$9.10 an hour – no one can

survive on that, and that’s not even half of what a single parent with a child needs to make a living,” Huntress says.

While the report’s to-do list did not include the price of housing, Huntress adds that the number of underwater homes across the region is also having a fundamental impact on working families.

“We should give banks an incentive to actually reset the underwater mortgages so that people are not one missed payment away from foreclosure,” she says.

But the most important thing for local communities to do is provide support for low-income families, Huntress says.

“Really the big one is making sure that we invest in state and federal safety net programs like SNAP (the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program), which should be strengthened and not cut.

“Earned income tax credit, childcare assistance, all of these things could help bring down the cost of living,” Huntress says.

“Fifteen dollars as it turns out is actually very modest,” Mulady says, “but it’s a place to begin.”

Read the full reports at www.thejobgap.org.