

## Freezing cont'd from pg 1

50 miles (80 kilometers) east of Seattle. Northeast of Seattle, U.S. Highway 2 over Stevens Pass was also closed in both directions because of multiple collisions, the Washington Department of Transportation said.

The agency said it has deployed plows to major thoroughfares across the region and said its

**“The county said it will open four severe weather shelters**

maintenance crews will be working through the night for the next several days.

Snowfall has also impacted air travel throughout the region.

In Vancouver, Canada, authorities at the city's YVR airport said the conditions have resulted in an “unprecedented num-

ber of cancelled flights,” adding that cancellations and delays “will persist for the majority of scheduled flights” and that de-icing operations will continue to be necessary.

At Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, 195 flights had been canceled and 295 delayed as of 3:20 p.m., according to online tracker FlightAware. Earlier in the day, the airport said de-icing operations were in effect.

Areas north of Seattle received heavy snowfall. About 90 miles (145 kilometers) north of the city, in and around Bellingham, people were shoveling sidewalks and driveways, as well as sledding and cross-country skiing, after about a foot (30 centimeters) of snow fell in some places.

In Oregon, officials are preparing for frigid temperatures that have been forecasted for later in the week.

Multnomah County and its seat, Portland, both declared a state of emergency starting

## Griot cont'd from pg 1

And just as quickly, the neighborhood's Black identity and any semblance of its history began to disappear.

“For the white folks moving into it, they don't see themselves as having displaced anything,” Merriwether said. “It's not like they've got malice. The Blacks, to a great extent, have been salt-and-peppered out into the south-end cities of Seattle. But they didn't move into a neighborhood. They're all over the place. So there is no Black neighborhood.”

Merriwether has few complaints about his family's relocation to Kirkland, or the fact that he and his brother and sister were the only Black students in their new school. On the contrary, Merriwether recalls having an excellent time in high school.

But he regrets the loss of any real kind of Black neighborhood in Seattle. And so, with Evans and Charlie James, he has become one of the three main interviewers for the Seattle Griot Project, which is now headquartered in the Columbia City Theater in Seattle, where sit-down conversations of around two hours are recorded onstage or in a conference room nearby.

Inevitably, the project expanded its scope.

### Hard Copies of History

After sitting down with longtime activist Eddie Rye Jr., interviewer Charlie James reported on the wealth of resource materials Rye had held onto that validated his stories.

“Eddie has been saving newspapers since 1969,” Evans said. “He had a garage full of this stuff. So for that year of 2021 until March of 2022, I went over there twice a week sorting, scanning and logging this information.”

The interviewers began asking whether their sources had any materials to go along with their oral histories. They found that the vast majority did.

“So now we're in all these peoples' homes, and some of the stuff is so inter-

stellar,” Evans said. “A lot of these elderly people don't know how to scan their own work or don't have the tools. You offer this service for free because they have let you into their lives, and it's a win-win situation.”

“The real secret, it's been overlooked, is if the people have survived the experience and they're still in our community or any community, quite a large amount of them will have artifacts. These artifacts alone may not tell the whole story, but the convergence of the different articles and stories that are told, become the story of what went on.

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“Digitizing isn't like taking possession. You'll go into the home or they'll loan you the document for a period of time, you digitize it and give it back in the same state it was before or better, and they get a copy of the digital and you get a copy of the story so now you can tell it.”

Volunteers with the Seattle Griot Project have begun offering a complementary thumb drive to interviewees containing newspapers, photos and other materials they contributed that have been digitized.

And though elders are generally pretty eager to share their stories, the group did not lose sight of the fact that all of the remembering and sourcing was unpaid. This, Evans explained, has been key to securing funding for the project.

“All of the work we're doing with these people, they're volunteering,” he said. “It's allocated as volunteering. When you have 100 people, now you've got a community involved. A lot of these neighborhood grants look for programs – whether it's to solve crimes or preserve heritage content – and within these projects, they're look-



AP PHOTO/TED MATHIAS

## Today in History: Christmas Styling

Roslyn Williams, a hairstylist at high-Tech Hair Stylists in Pikesville, Md., Sunday, Dec. 22, 1991 gives first class treatment to Ronnits Coleman, a homeless woman living at My Sister's Place in Baltimore. The owner Darnetts Royster, wanted to help give homeless women something to feel good about at Christmas time.

Tuesday, the county said in a statement. Officials said the declaration is meant to “alert the public to the life-threatening temperatures” and give

the county the maximum flexibility to respond.

The county said it will open four severe weather shelters at 8 p.m. on Wednesday for as long as

conditions require.

Temperatures in the Portland area on Thursday morning could dip down into single digits with wind chill and

plunge to near zero degrees Fahrenheit in and near the Gorge, according to the National Weather Service in Portland.

ing for cohesion. If you have a cohesive community, now your police don't have to do any work.”

Another source of funding that dovetailed with the Seattle Griot Project's process was a grant from the National Endowment of Humanities.

“If you're preserving newspapers that are from 1963 or older, you can apply,” Evans said. “You're digitizing and preserving stuff so the Library of Congress gets access to it.”

### Recent Forgotten Eras

“I'm finding the biggest abyss between the digital age and the analog age is there's this divide, where the material has not been digitized, so it's not online, it's not available, so it really doesn't exist,” Evans said. “When you start getting into the 70s, the 80s, the 90s, you are in fresh territory.”

“The stories carry so much weight. They wanted to preserve this legacy, and they wanted people to recognize hey, we've been here. I know 99% of these people didn't really know what they were going to do with this material.”

He has found sources with file cabinets full of information. Norman Proctor, the son and namesake of a former Tuskegee Airman, kept issues from The Garfield Messenger, his largely Black high school's campus newspaper, from the mid-60s, along with the odd issue of The Seattle Post-Intelligencer that covered his time participating in track and field competitions.

“I'm finding that most of the people we do oral histories with have some kind of paper trail to validate what they say,” Evans said. “It's literally, ‘I bought the car, here's the receipt.’”

### Important Data

Evans sees additional significance for gathering such histories – data.

“As we're scanning as many of the newspapers as possible, I want to analyze the economic potential of the Black community in the United States,” he said. “(Studying ads and local human interest features) gives us a better gauge of, how was our little communi-

ty's economy doing? If we could target Cleveland's Black economy, New York's Black economy, etc., from the same time, and see were people buying stuff for this much? Did they have big unemployment rates? Then we can start gauging what builds and what stagnates our communities. We want to have this database, and we want it to be verifiable. So the newspaper archives with dates and times will validate our statistics.

“If (Black members of the community) had a little garage, a barbershop, if they had a beauty shop, you would see the name, you would see the address, you would see who's running it, then you find the innerconnectivity to the activity of the business as well as the impact in the community, talking to people who are doing these interviews.”

For now, the group is in the process of transitioning its website “from being a presentation site to being an information site” with an easily navigable index. Grant funding has allowed them to bring on an archivist, too, who holds workshops for the community on how to preserve tangible relics like newspapers and photos.

Ultimately, the group would like to expand to become the Pacific Northwest Griot Project, and aims to see its methods replicated in other states and regions.

“This task is so big,” Evans said. “Every time I mention it, people take a step back. But if you don't even attempt to do it, it will not happen.”

He has found more financial support for the endeavor in the wake of the George Floyd and Breonna Taylor killings, and emphasizes the importance of preserving and making accessible

“We have to find commonality to stop all the craziness that goes on,” he said. “When everybody finds out they're in the same pot, or we even share some history or ancestry or experiences with our grandparents, the world just becomes a little bit smaller.”

For more information, visit <https://www.theseattlegriotproject.com>.