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Skanner.

Roberts recalls how the efforts of The Skanner cofounder and owner Bernie Foster led to an organization that now offers one-on-one counseling for prospective homebuyers, homebuyer education, foreclosure prevention services, estate planning, assistance with down payments and

neighborhood level: In Albina, Black families owned 36% fewer homes in the Albina neighborhood than they had 10 years before. The 2021 census showed a 25% homeownership gap for Black Portland residents, with only 40% owning rather than renting.

It is an issue that the state legislature has

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more. The organization’s mission is to help families “to obtain, retain, maintain and sustain their homes.”

“Bernie was writing about the state of Black homeownership in Portland, and we found out that we (had the lowest rates) in the nation,” Roberts said. “He convened a meeting with some community leaders and business people and neighborhood stakeholders, and said we’ve got a problem. He proposed hosting some homeownership fairs to give people access to information and funding or whatever was available. And back then, nothing was available — nothing like what we have today. Then we thought, well, it still wasn’t enough.

“We had an opportunity to apply for a grant at what is now the Portland Housing Bureau. We applied for the grant and got it, it kept spurring homeownership fairs. At the time, Bernie went to the county and Fannie Mae and other housing folks, and said ‘You need to support this, you need to be a sponsor.’”

The fairs were running strong, and continue to this day – the most recent was held last weekend. But Foster saw the need for year-round services – a vision he shared with Roberts during a run-in at the market.

“When Bernie saw me in the store, he says, ‘We need to do more for our people. There’s a grant out, let’s write it,’” Roberts recalled. “And we started programming... Our first program was a homebuyer coaching project, and then it led to us becoming a (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development)-approved housing counseling agency.”

In 1999, as Foster dug into the data on Black homeownership in the city, the numbers were especially stark on a

focused on since 2018 through the Joint Interim Task Force on Addressing Racial Disparities in Homeownership. As experts point out, fair housing policies enacted a half-century ago gave Black Americans better access to the housing market, but didn’t counteract systemic oppression that had led to lower wages and ingrained, discriminatory lending practices. When someone becomes the first in their family to own a home, they do not have the same generational wealth or experience navigating the real estate market as someone who comes from a long line of homeowners.

Roberts counts herself in the second category.

“I come from a long line of generational homeowners,” Roberts said. “I’m from Illinois and I can still go home to the same property I grew up on. It stayed in the family. My father believed in homeownership, so I didn’t know anything else but that.”

Roberts said when she arrived in Portland, she was surprised by the number of people who had been renting the same property for 20 or 30 years.

“A lot of folks got a little complacent because they were able to stay on the same property renting from the same landlord,” she said.

Now, the AAAH works to prepare future homebuyers for the realities of buying and maintaining a home, making sure clients have a full sense of additional costs like property taxes and maintenance. And the organization is there to support homeowners who are at risk of missing mortgage payments or who are already at risk of foreclosure. A home retention and repairs program, run in partnership with

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GREG KIMSEY/CLARK COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE VIA AP

Fires Set in Ballot Boxes

In this image provided by the Clark County Auditor’s Office, ballots damaged in a drop box arson in Vancouver, Wash., are spread on tables on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024. Investigators say the man suspected of setting fires in ballot drop boxes in Oregon and Washington state is an experienced metalworker and may be planning additional attacks. Authorities believe he had a “wealth of experience” in metal fabrication and welding, and is described as a white man, age 30 to 40, who is balding or has very short hair. Police previously said surveillance video showed the man driving a black or dark-colored 2001 to 2004 Volvo S-60. The vehicle didn’t have a front license plate but did have a rear plate with unknown letters or numbers. Elections staff were able to identify 488 damaged ballots retrieved from the Vancouver box, and as of Tuesday evening, 345 of those voters had contacted the county auditor’s office to request a replacement ballot. The office will mail 143 ballots to the rest of the identified voters on Thursday. Voters in Washington are encouraged to check the status of their ballots at www.votewa.gov to track their return status. In Portland, it appears a fire suppression system worked to contain the blaze and limited the number of ballots damaged to three.

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erty that would be long-lasting. I realized that the city had this big goal of creating housing in the future...it just matched who we were as the Strong family.”

The nonprofit Self Enhancement, Inc. and Community Development Partners co-own the site, and are working together to develop 21 one-bedroom units, 32 two-bedroom units and 22 three-bedroom units on the property. The residential building is expected to open in March 2026.

A Long, Traumatic Road

For Strong, the development will stand in defiance of gentrification. But the road to Tuesday’s groundbreaking subjected Strong and his brother Luther to many subtle facets of the practice.

“We were limited in what we could do,” Strong told The Skanner.

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ner. “That was part of the gentrification that was happening in North/Northeast Portland, because we weren’t able to really get any financing to be able to develop it like we wanted to. In fact, we got fined like all-get-out by a system that was, either consciously or unconsciously, gentrifying the whole neighborhood, and us in particular.”

Alongside redlining, the brothers learned firsthand the damaging process of red-tagging.

“They used to have this old policy where they would ‘red tag’ a house in North/Northeast Portland, and once the house got that designation, it went into the city’s database and then there were timelines you had to adhere to be able to get these infractions that the city says were happening with

that particular property – you had to get them remedied,” Strong said. “There was this guy who worked for the city who would actually go through North and

“That’s another way that gentrification was coming at us

Northeast Portland, and red-tag these houses, and then on the flipside, either acquire them or find developers to buy them at these incredibly low prices, because the city would sometimes auction the houses off...for pennies on the dollar.

“Those fines would escalate and continue to grow until a person couldn’t hardly pay them. We had to go to great lengths to be able to secure financing to be able to hold onto the properties. They were red-tagged, so that means they needed to be rehabbed, but the banks were part of the problem with gentrification because there was the targeted area of North/Northeast Portland that was sort of redlined, you couldn’t get a loan to rehab the properties. That’s another way that gentrification was coming at us that we had to deal with.”

In addition, Strong had to fight for a reclassification of the property under new zoning changes, to allow for higher-capacity development in line with surrounding properties.

The development, Strong said, will be a tribute to him and his brother “for being able to overcome gentrification,” he said.

“That in itself I think is worthy for the community to know,” said Strong, a licensed clinical social worker with a doctorate in social work research. He plans to have continuing input on the support-

ive services provided in the new residential community.

The Strong building will join Alberta Alive’s three other affordable residential properties named after prominent Black Portlanders, like Paul and Geneva Knauls, Ronnie Herndon and Dr. Darrell Millner.

Ideally, Strong said, he’d like to see the new development named Luther Strong Jr. and Dr. Jackie Strong’s Empowerment Village.

Exiting Homelessness Downtown

On Thursday, the Fairfield Apartments reopened with 75 studio and one-bedroom apartments downtown. New residents receive rent assistance in order to prevent paying more than 30% of their income on housing.

The building at Harvey Milk Street and Southwest 11th Avenue is open to residents exiting homelessness. Home Forward oversaw the completion of seismic upgrades to the more than century-old building, as well as window and elevator replacement and other structural improvements.

The city noted that former Fairfield residents were given relocation benefits during the upgrades, and given the option to return once construction was complete.

Fairfield offers permanent supportive housing, with culturally specific services like peer and mental health support, life skills and housing retention provided by the Urban League of Portland.

In August, the city’s housing bureau awarded about \$42 million to Home Forward and the Urban League of Portland for a 14-story, 230-unit development on the Broadway corridor. Units will range from studios to three-bedrooms and be designated as either affordable or rent-assisted.