

## A little more light on little-known history

Thursday, August 07, 2008

By Erin Hoover Barnett

**The Oregonian Staff**

When Portlanders talk about the city's African American history, many speak of the black shipyard workers who were relocated to inner North and Northeast after the 1948 Vanport flood.

Fewer know about the African American business district that thrived around Union Station in the early 1900s. Among black-owned businesses, the Golden West Hotel, 707 N.W. Everett, became the social focal point with its restaurant, Turkish baths, barbershop, gambling room, gymnasium and ice cream parlor.

Now a project to better display Golden West's history is among 12 recipients of city grants from the Vision Into Action Coalition.

"It was surprising to some of the committee members the African American history that existed near Union Station. They considered that area Chinatown or Old Town," says Stephanie Stephens, Vision Into Action's manager.

The coalition is acting on priorities, such as acknowledging city history -- identified during Mayor Tom Potter's visioning process. A committee of community, business and government representatives chose recipients from 55 applications.

The grants range from \$2,500 to the Good in the Neighborhood multicultural music and food festival to \$10,000 to expand the newspaper Street Roots on the east side.

Central City Concern received \$9,250 for the Golden West display. The nonprofit, a social service and low-income housing agency, bought and rehabbed the hotel in 1989. The agency worked with the late Kathryn Hall Bogle and others to locate and display historic photos in window boxes outside the hotel. Bogle's father owned the hotel barbershop. Her son, Dick Bogle, became a city commissioner.

The new project, led by historian Jackie Peterson Loomis on behalf of Central City Concern, will upgrade the display and add another window box. Peterson Loomis, co-founder of the Old Town History Project, plans to incorporate audio, including music from the time and interviews with people such as Dick Bogle. "It's an opportunity to position the Golden West as one of the most important centerpieces for this quite unique community of middle-class African Americans," Peterson Loomis says. "It was a very tiny black community in a very racist city and state, but they really managed to build a community in that neighborhood."

By 1900, most of the 1,000 African Americans in Portland lived near Union Station, Peterson Loomis wrote in the grant application. Before 1885, they were limited to jobs as bootblacks, domestics and laborers. But as steamships and railroads flourished, African Americans gained better-paying jobs as Pullman porters, barbers and hotel cooks and waiters, giving rise to a middle class.

Other black-owned businesses also thrived around Union Station, from pool halls to haberdasheries, as well as churches.

Peterson Loomis credits Will Bennett, an African American community activist and amateur historian, and Darrell Millner, a Portland State University professor of black studies, for advocating recognition of the business district.

"We need to tell Portland's African American history to understand Portland's history," says Bennett, whose Web site, <http://african-american-historical-district.com>, chronicles the hotel's story. The Golden West and surrounding businesses, Bennett says, "became a place for us to become a community."

Erin Hoover Barnett: 503-294-5011; [ehbarnett@news.oregonian.com](mailto:ehbarnett@news.oregonian.com)

©2008 Oregonian