

# Activist Advances Local, Political Causes

Keeping progress on justice issues in focus

By CHARITY PRATER  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Jo Ann Bowman, 49, sits in her office thinking for a moment about her upbringing, her experiences, and her appreciation for Dr. Martin Luther King.

"It wasn't until adulthood when I really began appreciating MLK. I was always more of a Malcolm X fan, only because I couldn't imagine being abused and not having a right to strike back," Bowman says. "Nowadays, we are still fighting racism, just during a different time of war."

Bowman is the associate director of Oregon Action and has been since 2004. There, she is committed to educating low income people and advocating, politically and otherwise, for their best interest.

"We are focused on getting people connected and excited about our political system," Bowman says.

Oregon Action is a membership-based organization that fre-



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER  
Community activist Jo Ann Bowman (left) and Turiya Autry, professor of Black Studies at Portland State University, attend a fall seminar on



Oregon Action is a membership-based organization that frequently works on combating local issues.

"One member of ours is an immigrant and spoke about getting pulled over by the police four times in a short period of time," she says. "And to address that we held community meetings so the police could share their policies with the community and the community could share with them their viewpoints."

Along with addressing racial profiling, Oregon Action works to register new voters during election times, and advocate for low income people who other-

wise might think that they have no effect on influencing their local community.

Bowman was born and raised in Baltimore, Md. and for a brief period of time attended the University of Maryland. She soon left her college career to join the Navy. She spent four and a half years traveling in the service.

"The most amazing place we stopped at was Mombasa, Africa (along the Kenya coast)," she says, "It was the first time I had ever been to a place where a majority of the people looked just like me. It was incredible."

*Community activist Jo Ann Bowman (left) and Turiya Autry, professor of Black Studies at Portland State University, attend a fall seminar on racial profiling and resistance in Portland.*

Bowman's parents' generation lived through segregation and she remembers them telling her about it. Sadly, she believes that her generation has, in a sense, protected their children from the history of racism by not passing the stories down.

After the Navy, Bowman worked in real estate and decided to move on after she noticed that the real estate industry was on a downward swing.

She moved to Oregon in 1990, from Oakland, Calif. She wanted to be able to afford her own home and still be close to the

water and mountains.

"It was a toss up between Denver and Portland," she says,

"I chose Portland because I knew one person here that I could stay with until I got a job."

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One of her first jobs in Oregon was working for Bev Stein, who was the chair of Multnomah Board of Commissioners at the time, which was the largest influence on her next decision.

"I saw her and I thought I can do this!"

Bowman ran for State Representative in northeast Portland after that, "And I won!"

She remembers elective office as one of the most rewarding jobs she has ever had.

"The hours were terrible, the pay was awful, but I came home



knowing that I had impacted other people's lives," she says.

Ultimately, influencing people's lives and uniting the community is what Bowman lives for.

"Even though we are fighting a different war today, Martin Luther King's words come back

*Institutional  
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— Portland activist Jo Ann Bowman

to me," Bowman says.

"Institutional racism is our biggest problem. Our country isn't a huge melting pot of different ethnicities or a tossed salad of immigrants, unless we address racism as a country, as an issue, inequality will continue to be created."