

**Charles McGee for School Board**  
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PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Charles McGee outside his northeast Portland campaign headquarters in 2005 during a race for school board. He said the campaign was the best learning experience he ever had.

## Emerging young leader draws on his past

BY CHARITY PRATER  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

For Charles McGee, finding unity among races, genders and cultures means building bridges, creating relationships and educating people about diversity.

McGee, 21, is one of Portland's emerging young leaders. He looks to build his career with elements of leadership, community and education just as the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did.

"Some people forget that Martin Luther King Jr. sweat, cried and put his life at risk so that I could have the freedom that I do today," he says.

Born in war-torn Liberia, McGee and his family, including his three sisters and one brother came to America in search of a better life. His father became his ideal role model as a prominent member of American society and successful school teacher.

McGee looks back to his childhood in Liberia and vividly remembers seeing the tragedy of

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— Charles McGee

war. He remembers being a majority in a country full of dark skinned people with prominent black doctors and lawyers that looked like him.

After coming to America he saw a country torn by racism. The discrimination of people based on color gave him a better understanding of the significance of being black in America.

After going through the Portland Public School System, graduating from Franklin High School, McGee saw the obvious need to change the

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system to close the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. He was just 19 at the time.

He lost the 2005 election, but felt the campaign for public office was the best learning experience he ever had.

"I see joy in everything that happens," McGee says. "I believe that everything happens for a reason."

McGee continues his dedication to community activism by addressing education, racial profiling and gender inequality issues.

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## Emerging young leader draws on past

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"People think that another super force like Martin Luther King will come along," he says, "What we really have to work for is finding ways to unify and unite the community. Everyone must be a leader."

In the future, Charles hopes to run for office again, but for now he is focusing on shorter-term goals. He'd like to get married, have kids, work on his career and continue living a happy and fulfilling life.

"I'd like to think that I continuously work on making a positive impact on the people around me as Dr. King did," he said. "I also hope to give back to the people in my life that have helped me so much."



*Charles McGee works to change the system as a local activist addressing education, racial profiling and gender inequality issues.*