

# THE SKANNER

CHALLENGING PEOPLE TO SHAPE A BETTER FUTURE NOW



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# SEAFAIR PARADE

Demonte Boss, 17, a drum major with the Seattle All City Band, leads the ensemble during a performance July 12 at the 59th annual Wallingford Seafair Kiddie Parade and Street Fair. The official Seafair event included hundreds of children representing a variety of schools and organizations and an appearance by the notorious Seafair Pirates.

PHOTO BY SUSAN PERD



# ACORN Offers Advice

Homeowners from all walks of life are staring down debt

By William Crane  
Special to *The Skanner*

On a recent Tuesday evening, homeowners at risk of foreclosure attended a housing intake at The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now office in Burien.

The homeowners were from a variety of ethnic, social and age backgrounds. All, however, shared the same worries about regarding their mortgage and wanted ACORN to assess their needs and find out how they can help them

"It's not only a Black or minority problem," said John Jones, Washington State Chapter president of ACORN. "No one is exempt — everyone's living in sub-prime hell."

According to Realtytrac.com, over 1400 homes were foreclosed across the Seattle Metro area in May alone. With numbers on the rise, the current housing crisis is being felt across all social, economic and class lines.

Predatory lending and sub-prime mortgages are the main culprits what is described by many news organizations as the worst housing downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

ACORN began their local Working Families Prosperity Project in February 2007 to address the rise in foreclosures among lower income homeowners and negotiate fairer mortgage rates.

"To everybody else, we may have it all," said Jones. "But how do we admit to our family, our neighbors that we are in debt and owe money?"

While the crisis is felt across economic and class lines, ACORN says the people most effected and most vulnerable to foreclosure are lower and middle-income homeowners.

Those who fall behind in their monthly payments are often consumers of predatory lending or victims of circumstance.

Cal Austin, a mother of six kids, struggled paying her mortgage after her husband had

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# Freedom School Fights for Rights

Four-day teaching sessions revive classic Civil Rights Era schools

By Lisa Loving  
Of *The Skanner*

What can you do to fight racism? Why are people poor? Why are so many people of color in prison?

Organizers with the American Friends Service Committee and the Peoples' Institute for Survival and Beyond have answers, and they're holding their annual Freedom School to teach youth about their history and their community power.

The Freedom School is scheduled July 21 through 25 from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on

Beacon Hill in Seattle.

The goal is to empower young people to learn about racism and organize to undo it.

"The Freedom School is based on the kind of Freedom Schools that took place in the Civil Rights movement and the Freedom Summer of 1964," says Dustin Washington, the director of community justice programs for the AFSC and core trainer for the PINW. "We just felt like young people need to get more of a social consciousness so they could deal with the issues impacting their lives."

The project was started in 2000, when communities around the Seattle area were

grappling with race and racism issues in the schools and law enforcement.

Today, Freedom Schools are held around the greater Seattle area that draw kids from as far away as the Tulalip Reservation and the Mukilteo, North Sound area. Every winter, they hold one as well.

"Our Freedom Schools are multiracial with about 85 percent students of color," Washington says. "The participants are ages 15 to 21, kids in universities, kids who have been kicked out of schools — it's pretty diverse."

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# Fort Lawton Soldiers Finally Find Peace

Restitution ceremonies for wrongfully convicted will be July 24-27

U.S. Army Assistant Secretary Ronald James — the highest-ranking African American — will be keynote speaker and preside over the official ceremonies to restore the military honors of dozens of African American soldiers wrongfully convicted in the Fort Lawton murder of an Italian prisoner of war in 1944.

Four days of tributes and events are

scheduled July 24 through 27 around Seattle, including the gathering of three dozen soldiers' survivors from around the country, as well as a symposium, a Catholic mass, a dinner, a formal ceremonial tribute, a community picnic, a parade and worship services.

"The Army does not do this — the Army gets tens of thousands of appeals all the

time," said investigative reporter Jack Hamann, whose book, "On American Soil," effectively reopened the case -- generations after the event.

"They don't reinstate people," Hamann said. "But not only are they removing the dishonorable discharges, they're negotiat-

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# Housing

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## PROGRAM AIMS TO CURB HOME LOSS

Are you facing an uncertain housing future because of an expensive mortgage? The Urban League of Seattle is sponsoring a workshop to help people at risk of losing their home. "To Own and Keep Your Home: Mortgage Intervention Workshop and Community Discussion" will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Aug. 9 at the NW African American Museum, 2300 S. Massachusetts St. in Seattle.

There will be experts speaking about loss mitigation, partial claims, loan repayment plans, loan modification and forbearance agreements. There will be time for speakers to answer specific questions you may have about your mortgage. Lunch will be served.

To register please call 206-461-3792 ext. 3004, or email [ulmshousing@urbanleague.org](mailto:ulmshousing@urbanleague.org). The program is co-sponsored by the Asset Building Collaborative and Solid Ground.

knee problems that kept him from working. They refinanced their mortgage after becoming mired in debt.

However, their new mortgage's interest rate rose from 5 percent to 9.7 percent. This meant that her monthly mortgage payment also increased dramatically.

"I knew what I could do and no way was I going to be pushed out of my home," Austin said. "I had to be proactive."

She attended a foreclosure intake in February at ACORN. Afterwards, her hous-

ing counselor renegotiated her mortgage, decreasing her monthly mortgage payment from over \$3,100 to \$2,200.

Others at risk of foreclosure refinanced their mortgages based on financial advice from their existing lender, but soon found themselves in worse financial shape.

"We refinanced our mortgage because we couldn't get a loan from anywhere else," said Julio Santos.

Julio and his wife Linda trusted their lender at Washington Mutual, because he had got them into their previous two homes. He recommended that they refinance their current mortgage in order to pay off debts and afford necessary home repairs.

"He was our friend, and promised lower monthly payments and interest rates," said Santos.

However, their loan's interest soon rose from 6.9 percent to over 10 percent. With their money already spent on home repairs, they were now stuck in a home they could not afford and quickly fell behind on their monthly payments.

ACORN is currently working to renegotiate their interest rate with their lender and to obtain a forbearance on the owed payments, which means that amount would be carried over to the end of the mortgage.

The Santos family says ACORN is helping them to renegotiate with lenders and teaching them important skills related to their mortgage and financial matters.

"Honestly, I'm not a financial kind of guy," said Santos said. "But we've gone to some of their educational workshops and I've learned a lot and become more



Cal Austin, who had trouble making mortgage payments after her husband's injury, was helped by ACORN's advisors.

involved in my mortgage."

ACORN says their housing project has helped more than 4,000 people avoid foreclosure and hope to reach 20,000 nationally. Locally, they have helped over 100 people since February and see six or seven new homeowners every week.

"It is a nationwide epidemic, but we teach our members to be proactive not reactive," said Jones. "It's not a shame to be in debt, but it is a sin if you don't defend what is yours."

On July 17, ACORN is holding Washington's first ever mortgage help fair.

The event is a mass intake of borrowers seeking help. The fair will be held at the Burien Town Hall and is coming together of community members, Washington State legislators, major lenders ACORN state leaders and troubled borrowers.

The event is meant to provide help and create awareness about the epidemic of foreclosures, which creates hardship on those who are most vulnerable. ACORN also holds regular foreclosure intakes in order to provide information and counseling for troubled home borrowers. For more information, visit <http://www.acorn.org>

# Freedom

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In 1964, thousands of students attended Freedom Schools in Mississippi. The goal, organizers say, is to teach students information that was excluded from public schools because of institutional racism.

Today's Freedom School students are learning about the history and the philosophy of the Civil Rights Movement, and community organizing skills.

Washington says the same information is left out of schools today — and students have to go elsewhere to learn about their cultural histories.

"One of the things we want to do with the Freedom School concept is expand it so this style, this method we use can be used in the public schools," Washington says.

"And," he adds, "it's not just the young people who've been mis-educated — the adults need anti-racism education as well."

Freedom School students take field trips

around the city, learn anti-racist community organizing skills, and listen to community elders.

Organizers say they want to create a fundamental understanding about the nature of the education system, the media, and the criminal justice system, "to create change and share culture."

The group is part of a national network operating Freedom Schools around the country, including Oakland, Calif.; New Orleans, La.; Duluth, Minn.; Philadelphia, and Farrell, Penn.

The weeklong programs evolved from 2-day Undoing Racism workshops, based on a model developed by the Peoples' Institute for Survival and Beyond.

"This year we'll have over 150 who've participated," Washington says. "We've probably had, over the past 8 or 9 years, well over 2000 people — and we've drawn

people from Philadelphia and California."

He is eager for the program to grow into other regions. The school is named after one of the most loved and respected community activists in the history of Seattle.

Tyree Scott was a labor organizer, a community leader and a poet. In the late 1960s, Scott — a 29-year-old electrician who worked for his father's company — led a long but ultimately successful drive to break the color barrier in the city's construction industry trades.

In the 1970s, Scott helped start the Northwest Labor and Employment Law Office — where his two Phillipino co-founders were reportedly assassinated in Seattle by Ferdinand Marcos.

Over the years, Scott became increasingly focused on linking the ongoing civil rights movement for Black workers in the United States with the issues affecting workers around the world; he also organized material aid campaigns benefitting Mozambique and South Africa.

In 1999, Scott helped organized the huge public rejection of the World Trade Organization that led to street rioting that shut down the international WTO Conference held that year in Seattle. He died of cancer four years later.

For more info, or to host a Freedom School, contact Washington at [dwashington@afsc.org](mailto:dwashington@afsc.org), 206-632-0500, ext. 14.

In 1964, thousands of students attended Freedom Schools in Mississippi

the convictions declaring that their prosecution had been "fundamentally unfair," and that Army prosecutor Leon Jaworski (who prosecuted President Richard Nixon's fellow conspirators in the Watergate case) had deliberately hidden evidence supporting the Black soldiers' innocence.

The restitution events kick off with a symposium called "Race, Justice & the Military," Thursday, July 24, 5 p.m. at Pigott Auditorium at

Seattle University Symposium, with a showing of the video: Setting the Record Straight (30 min), by Robert Mak, KING-TV.

The panel includes Betty Dovich, Seattle/King County NAACP, Major General Timothy Lowenberg, U.S. Army

judge advocate general, Professor Robert Chang of the Seattle University School of Law; and Jack Hamann, author of *On American Soil*.

A reception at Pigott Auditorium will be held immediately following, at 6:30, then at 7:30 p.m. will be a mass at Seattle University's Chapel of St. Ignatius, in memory of Olivotto, the murdered Italian soldier.

On Friday at 5 p.m. is a tour of the Northwest African American Museum for Ft. Lawton veterans and family members, then at 6 p.m. there is the Northwest African American Museum Gala dinner honoring Ft. Lawton veterans and family members.

On Saturday at 10 a.m., there will be a ceremony called "Restoring Honor," at Discovery Park, including the presentation of belated honorable discharges for Fort Lawton veterans. At 7:30 that night, family members will participate in the Seattle Seafair Torchlight Parade.

# Restitution

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ing the amount of back pay and restitution to the survivors"

On August 14, 1944, African American soldiers at Seattle's Fort Lawton allegedly rioted against Italian prisoners of war, in what became the only known case of African Americans prosecuted for a mob lynching.

Newspaper accounts at the time claimed the incident was touched off by Black soldiers' resentment of Italian POWs over the Army's favorable treatment of those who volunteered for service projects with the U.S. soldiers. Dozens of American and Italian soldiers were beaten. The next morning Guglielmo Olivotto, a prisoner of war, was found hanging from a tree at Fort Lawton.

Some 43 Black soldiers — and no Whites — were charged; the Army investigation was classified. After the longest court martial of World War II, 23 African American

soldiers were convicted of manslaughter for killing Olivotto.

The Army investigation into the incident was classified. Sixty years later it was quietly declassified.

Hamann, who had been interested in the case for years, accidentally came across the papers, which showed that Army officials knew that no evidence linked the Black soldiers to Olivotto's death.

In October 2007, after publication of Hamman's book, *On American Soil*, the Army's Board of Corrections of Military Records overturned the convictions, allowing the cases to be reopened.

More than six decades later, the U.S. Army's highest court of appeals overturned

... the only known case of African Americans prosecuted for a mob lynching.