

# PortlandTribune

## Back from ashes, center fulfills variety of dreams

*Garlington mental health center joined by medical clinic and gay nonprofit*

BY PETER KORN

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### Interesting, how one building can mean so many different things to so many people.

Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare reopened its Garlington Center on Northeast Martin Luther King Boulevard Friday amid a great deal of rejoicing. A ribbon was cut, speeches were made by notables, including an ex-mayor and a variety of leaders in the Portland black community. But not everyone present was celebrating the same thing.

Derald Walker was celebrating financial progress and also the way a disaster opened room for new community connections. Cascadia's chief executive officer, Walker came to the nonprofit in 2008, shortly after the financial meltdown that very nearly closed Multnomah County's largest provider of mental health services. It took a \$2.5 million state and county line of credit to save Cascadia.

But the Garlington's Center's particular disaster was near total destruction from a fire in October 2008. The fire's cause has not yet been determined, but many members of the Garlington community are convinced an arsonist was involved.

Walker said it cost \$2.2 million to rebuild Garlington, nearly all of it covered by the building's insurance policy. Of more concern is the ongoing operating cost for the center, an estimated \$1.3 million.

Walker didn't say keeping Garlington open on a sustainable basis will be easy, not with Cascadia still paying off \$2.3 million worth of loans.

"Running publicly funded health care is not for the faint of heart," he said. But on Friday, at least, Walker said the future for Cascadia looked brighter.

"We survived last year and we've come out a lot stronger," he said. "I think we'll be fine."

### New clinic space

The new Garlington Center represents substance for Jill Ginsburg, and relief. A family physician who started the North by Northeast Community Health Center three year ago in a tiny building on North Williams Avenue, Ginsburg has watched her free clinic patients line up outside on Thursday evenings, and sometimes wait in their cars.

Some of those people who had come to North by Northeast for the only health care available to them had to be turned away, sent to other safety net clinics. Ginsburg simply had no room.

Ginsburg has room now, at the Garlington Center. Her new clinic space is four times the size of the old, with four treatment rooms instead of two, a waiting area that can seat 20, and even a break room for volunteers.

Was there some sort of break room in the old North by Northeast clinic?

"Are you kidding?" Ginsburg asks. "We had a treatment area in a hallway behind the curtain. We're growing up and (Garlington Center) is a beautiful place for our patients."



TRIBUNE PHOTO: L.E. BASKOW Roy Jay (center) was part of an invocation at last week's ceremonies marking the reopening of the Garlington Center in North Portland. The center provides mental health counseling for many North Portland residents. L.E. BASKOW / TRIBUNE PHOTO



TRIBUNE PHOTO: L.E. BASKOW • *Ronald Keith Bishop, who participates in recovery meetings and support groups at Garlington Center several times a week, says he feels more comfortable in groups which include more black clients. "I've found a home in this clinic. I'll be here for the rest of my life," Bishop says.*

### Youth resource center

Proud as she has been of the Sexual and Gender Minority Youth Resource Center for which she serves as program director, Favor Ellis has recognized the center has not been as diverse as its name implies.

The Cascadia-financed center, based in Southeast Portland for 11 years, has been the only organization in Portland with the aim of providing a supportive environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youths.

But nearly all those youths were white.

And that is the primary reason the center has moved its offices and hangout space into the new Garlington Center.

"Queer identified African American youth in Northeast Portland may have felt like SMYRC was a resource for white youth," Ellis said, adding that non-heterosexual black youths may not have felt welcome in Southeast Portland. "It may have been scary for them," she said.

In the new Garlington Center building, the minority youth resource center may truly be able to bring in minority youths, Ellis said. Outreach has begun to predominately black organizations and churches in North and Northeast Portland. The message, Ellis said, is that gays, lesbian and transgender youths of all races are at increased risk for suicide, drugs, alcoholism, teen pregnancy and as victims of violence.

### Reopening is a tribute

Maggielean President also attended Friday's opening ceremony at the Garlington Center. President, a Northeast Portland resident who has been a Cascadia client since 1999, attends group therapy twice a week, so she's happy to have Garlington back. But the real significance of the reopening for President was what she calls "paying tribute."

Garlington Center is named after John Garlington, a black minister and social activist who died in a car accident 13 years ago. Reopening the center keeps Garlington's memory alive, according to President.

"Whoever did this did us a favor by setting this place on fire," President said. "The favor is that this place is looking better that it was at first."

### More triumphs

Nobody understands the daily struggle to overcome life's obstacles better than those who suffer prolonged mental illness. Ryan Hamit took the fire personally.

"I've seen programs come, stay a while and go. I've seen staff leave. I've seen a lot," said Ryan Hamit, who lives in the Beaverton District but formerly has received psychiatric mental health services at Garlington Center.

hour away by public transit. Hamit serves on the Garlington consumer council, which lobbied county officials to save Garlington during Cascadia's financial crisis.

"It's like an extended family to me," Hamit said, explaining why he travels cross-town.

The fire, to Hamit, was another obstacle in a series of obstacles faced by Garlington and the people who need its services.

"It's hard when there's always somebody out there trying to cut us down," he said.

For Hamit, last Friday's reopening was just one more in a long line of triumphs.

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