

January 8, 2021

## DORSETTE TO LEAD LOCAL NAACP IN 2021

Jason J. Dorsette, a champion of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, government, and corporate enterprises, is the 2021-22 president of the Corvallis-Albany Branch of the NAACP, including Linn and Benton counties. Branch president Angel Harris will hand over the gavel to Dorsette January 14 during the branch's next membership meeting.

For the next two years, Dorsette will lead the branch's 2021 executive committee including First Vice President Christopher Hughbanks, Second Vice President Janie Tebeau, Secretary Avonlea Capulet, Assistant Secretary Roberta Smith, Treasurer Sherrie Day and Assistant Treasurer Chelle Williams.

The Corvallis-Albany branch in 2021 has expanded to more than twice its size in 2020, an indication that Linn and Benton counties are ready for action. "I'm full of mixed emotions ranging from excitement to nervousness," Dorsette said of his position. "Madame President Angel Harris and former presidents Shelly Moon, Fred Edwards, and Barry Jerkins have certainly paved the way for us to do great work and to continue to get into trouble and for that I say Thank You."

Harris was equally grateful: "Jason J. Dorsette has the heart of a father, big brother, and friend. He is always lending his voice, education, and resources to the service of others. It has been a pleasure and an honor to work alongside him," she said.

Dorsette moved to Corvallis in 2014 to take a job at OSU and is working toward a doctoral degree in educational policy and equity at the university. He brought with him to Corvallis experience building bridges for individuals and organizations to effectively collaborate and engage in positive social change activities to help build a better community for all.

Dorsette's history, and prehistory, has prepared him for leadership and justice work with the local NAACP.

Dorsette said he grew up hearing stories of his family's struggles from his grandmother Lee Doris Melton Patrick, who inspired him to work in civil rights. Several of his relatives are actively involved in civil rights organizations including NAACP, which has supported Black folk and other people of color since 1909. But he admits, he wasn't always on the pathway to leadership. Divorce, the offshoot of drug abuse in his family, had left him "hot tempered" in his teens, he said. His own personal and sometimes unpleasant experiences in life drew him into education.

At North Carolina Central University (NCCU), a historical Black college & university (HBCU) located in Durham, North Carolina, Dorsette earned a degree in history and middle grade education, then worked as a 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher in Washington, DC, where he also volunteered for one of the Department of Education initiatives to support and mentor students of color that lived in the Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia areas. After teaching for a while, he returned to NCCU to earn a Master's degree in public policy and administration.

"I love working with youth and education, and I also am very fascinated with politics – those areas entice me," Dorsette said.

With his Master's degree, he worked as an university administrator, instructor, and was active in several local civic organizations and boards in the City of Durham, NC. To date, one of Dorsette's greatest accomplishments was serving as the founding director of the nationally- recognized Centennial Scholars program now known as the Male Achievement Center. In the four years that he served as director, the program expanded from 22 to 350 Black male students. The unique program continues today and is regarded as a model for other colleges and universities that seek to make positive impacts on Black male collegians retention and graduation rates.

His work attracted the attention of Oregon State University officials, who asked him to apply for a position and if given an opportunity to strongly consider working on the Corvallis campus. Dorsette said he was on his way to a national higher education conference in Atlanta to present on his male of color mentoring program when he stopped off at Corvallis on a clear October day. Initially, Dorsette's plan was to say he had at least visited Oregon because of his aspirations of visiting all 50 states before his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, and to date he has visited 44 states. He hadn't seriously considered taking the job in Oregon, but in Atlanta, he said he couldn't stop thinking about Oregon. Later that year, he gave notice at NCCU and moved to Oregon.

The culture shock began when he tried to find a loctician, a hair care specialist in dreadlocks, near Corvallis. He eventually found one in Portland. That was his first introduction to life in Oregon, where the Black population is now about 3 percent – even fewer in Linn and Benton counties, unlike North Carolina, which is 22 percent Black. “Here, my racial identity is more salient, more obvious,” Dorsette said. “I thought I was pretty confident in my understanding of my own racial identity development but moving to the Pacific Northwest indeed challenged that notion. I noticed my racial identity became of the utmost importance to me because I was lacking the type of community that I was accustomed to—the type of community I needed.”

While interviewing at OSU, Dorsette became friends with Barry Jerkins, the then president of the local NAACP Branch. Through Jerkins' friendship, stories, and shared experiences living in the Jim Crow South and then relocating to Oregon, Dorsette began to immerse himself in the local NAACP happenings and programs.

Dorsette's plans for the local branch continue to build on its legacy. Some of the Initiatives and special projects that his administration will launch over the next couple of years include:

- Promoting Environmental Climate Justice programs and activities;
- Enhancing partnership opportunities with local and regional organizations, including governmental agencies;
- Developing support for local Houseless population and overall Housing conditions in our local community;
- Improving relationships with the LGBTQ community members and their allies;
- Facilitating opportunities to design and implement affinity base sub-groups;
- Expanding economic development opportunities for BIPOC business owners and entrepreneurs;
- Enhancing partnerships in the K-20 educational system;
- Mentoring Black and Brown boys;
- Facilitating on-going social justice learning opportunities for NAACP members

Anyone interested in participating in these and other local NAACP branch activities is welcome, Dorsette said.