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COLMAN SCHOOL SIT-IN WILL CONTINUE TILL MUSEUM DISPUTE IS RESOLVED, ARTIST SAYS

By Darrell Glover P-I Reporter

MONDAY, April 28, 1986

Section: News, Page: D1

An artist who was in the group that moved into the abandoned Colman School and wants to turn it into an Afro-American heritage museum vows that the building will remain occupied until the dispute is resolved.

"We have really been expanding against the odds," said Earl Bebnam, who teaches art as part of the unofficial museum's program at Colman.

Bebnam was one of the original group that moved into the school at 1515 24th Ave. S. on Nov. 25. It had been closed because it was surrounded by the Interstate 90 construction project.

The Seattle School District cut off electricity to the building about six weeks after the museum proponents occupied it. All other utilities have also been cut off.

But Bebnam and others have supplied heat to at least one room with a kerosene heater. They also can get a limited supply of electricity for a few lights from a small, donated generator. Otherwise, they use candles.

Stan Evans, who is acting as a liaison between the occupying group and the outside community, said 12,000 signatures have been gathered on a petition supporting an Afro-American museum at the school.

Mayor Charles Royer has said his office is reviewing the availability of existing city properties where programs and activities that help meet the cultural needs of Seattle's black community can take place until a long-range solution can be found.

The mayor contends no discussion about Colman School property can take place until the school district and state highway officials conclude their negotiations over the site.

"We believe this (Colman School) is the best site," Evans said.

He said the museum needs an economic base to support its cultural activities and several ideas are being explored, including buying and selling abandoned homes near Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.



Although he isn't one of those occupying the building, Evans teaches black history six hours a week as part of the museum's program.

Those staying in the building and their supporters are keeping the lawn mowed outside and the grounds as clean as possible. Inside the school, they have set up a museum that includes African art pieces and paintings in two large rooms on the main floor.

Other rooms on the same floor are used as a music center and an upholstery workshop.

Buttons with photos of black leaders are made at the school and sold for \$2 apiece. Other items, such as books, magazines and greeting cards, are sold in a consignment shop.

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