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Hot on the Trail with...Sho Dozono

Beating the drum, finding his north star

by Stephen Marc Beaudoin

The air is thick with competing food scents and hip-hop beats from cars cruising down Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. It's an unseasonably warm Saturday afternoon, and kids crowd the sidewalks (many pulling parents) in this retail-choked intersection, with neighborhood restaurants rubbing shoulders down Killingsworth Street: Catalina's, Tonali's Burgers, the Philly Cafe ("Try our tasty foods!" the window reads).

Among the outside hustle, Reflections Cafe and Talking Drum Bookstore is a sea of relative calm, with a scattering of regulars perched on counter-side stools, many enjoying a casual lunch. (Ribs, brisket, red beans and rice, and potato salad are some specialties.) But there's also a small flow of in and out, and a certain charge in cafe conversation: The bookstore is doubling these days as a sort of neighborhood ground zero for Barack Obama's presidential campaign. An African-American family of four, the mother dressed in traditional clothing and headdress, leaves with armfuls of Obama campaign materials.

But there's another big campaign under way these days, and at 2 o'clock on the nose, an older gent cracks the air with a stentorian announcement: "It's the future mayor himself!"

Enter Sho Dozono, in shocking pink long-sleeve polo and khaki pants, light blue "Sho Dozono for Mayor" sticker affixed just so. Close on his heels, Dozono's daughter (and de facto campaign aide) Kristen—sporting a white T-shirt that screams "Vote for Sho" in

red letters—rushes in bearing lawn signs. She immediately sets to work: "My dad is here, he's running for mayor," she says to a father and son gnawing on sauce-soaked ribs. "Here's some information, and he'd appreciate your support." She hands them a flier.

Dozono says he's come straight from a debate training, where he's learning "how to respond to reporters" and "stay on message." As a first-time candidate for public office, this is all very new to Dozono, and he admits he's not accustomed to such scrutiny of word and gesture. Then he's hustled over to speak with a few interested voters seated around a small table. "I can answer some questions as to why I'm running and what's important to you as a business person," he says and, for nearly two hours, lightly moderates a citizen conversation careening from green technology to youth services, stroking his chin to signal he's listening.

The next day is crammed with campaign activity, from a morning "Walk for Autism" appearance to an afternoon house party hosted by former Portland Schools Foundation executive director Cynthia Guyer, a longtime Dozono colleague, at her Northeast Portland home, where a hand-scrawled sign directs comers to "Sho Up Here!"

Inside, Dozono is holding forth in the tastefully appointed living room: elegant vases and glassware, framed family photos, a coffee table loaded with arty books, picked-at snack bowls and campaign



Sho Dozono—all smiles on the campaign trail, fo Sho.

paraphernalia. Dozono hits his usual points: education, business and the need for Portland to be "globally competitive." He offers an example from that very morning, when he saw Portland

reps from Adidas and Nike off on a business matchmaking trip to Amsterdam, then hikes up his pants to reveal he's wearing one shoe from each company. The crowd goes wild. "My next 10 years," Dozono says with a broad smile, "could be my best 10 years yet."

There's some Q & A from the assembled audience, then Guyer starts to wrap things up: "I want to come back to the pitch," she says, encouraging on-the-spot check writing and indicating the availability of donation envelopes, which Dozono campaign manager Amie Abbott has at the ready.

Jeff Guyer, Cynthia's husband and a nonprofit consultant, saddles up with Marley, the family dog, and offers his reaction to Dozono's candidacy: "I like Sho, I like Sam [Adams]. I'd be happy seeing either guy as mayor," he says.

Packing up the table full of campaign materials before heading to his next event (a seder at Congregation Beth Israel), Cynthia offers some parting advice to the candidate: "Remember your north star," she says. "Portland should be known as having the best public school districts in the country." Jeff quickly adds, "Portland should be as well known for its public schools as it is for Mount Hood." Dozono nods, strokes his chin, then strides outside, and off to his next campaign stop. 10

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