

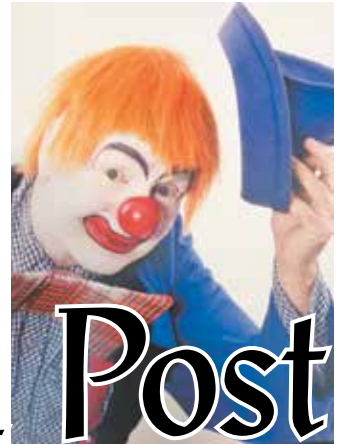
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Former Somali refugee finds new home in Southwest Portland

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

Saalim Saalim cannot forget the refugee camp where he lived almost 22 years. He remembers the loud, curdling screams in the middle of the night. Someone was most likely being bit by a poisonous snake or scorpion in the wilds of the Sahara desert in Kenya.

"The [U.N.] ambulance drivers were quick to the location of the cries," Saalim said while sitting down to speak to *The Post*.

He also remembers the good the United Nations did with donations of food boxes and care in the refugee camps.

Born in Somalia, on the Horn of Africa, Saalim's father was born in India. His mother is from Yemen. His family fled the civil war in 1990 when he was a teenager. They arrived in Mombasa, Kenya located on the coast of the Indian Ocean.

He would leave the camp for whatever work he could find: construction, truck

driver, or laborer. He also went to school.

The urban setting was a target for non-refugees pillaging the United Nations supplies: water, food rations, and blankets.

Soon after, the camp was resettled inland in the Sahara desert. Saalim and his family went as they had no other options.

The process to get resettled elsewhere outside Africa began right away, and in Saalim's case, it took decades. A supporter is needed in the host country.

Some of his family members were sent to London. Others were waiting for a U.S. sponsor. When an opportunity arose for Saalim, now with three boys and a wife, Southwest Portland was the place. Some distant relatives were already here. Church World Service paid for their flight.

"We also received a loan to get resettled in the U.S. but I'm still paying them back," he said proudly. "They didn't charge us interest."

Arriving in September of 2012, his family moved into the Markham

neighborhood in Section 8 housing for low-income individuals.

"The kids enrolled in Neighborhood House Head Start programs," he continued. "We attended English classes at IRCO (Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization) and IRCO provided us with job leads."

Saalim found temporary part-time work at Columbia Sportswear, then a job at Leatherman, and then he went back to Columbia.

After a home visit by a Neighborhood House social worker, Saalim felt ashamed of the stress he had providing for his family with sporadic paychecks. He told the case worker what he really needed: a permanent full-
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Saalim Saalim and his children celebrate Eid al-Fitr (Feast of Breaking the Fast) at the Oregon Convention Center on July 17. (Photo courtesy of Saalim Saalim)



Wilson students run drills in late August in hopes of making the soccer team. (Post photo by KC Cowan)



Wilson students Coby Hart, Jonah Hart, Corey Bissonette and Maddy Conkle are all juniors this year. (Post photo by KC Cowan)

Wilson students and teachers gear up for school year

By KC Cowan
The Southwest Portland Post

The pressure to get everything ready for the 2015/16 school year at Wilson High School was just a little bit more intense this year, because the first day of school came before Labor Day.

So teachers were back in the building on Aug. 24, and the first day of classes was Aug. 27.

Things were buzzing at Wilson the week of Aug. 17, however, as hundreds of students lined up for registration.

They picked up their schedules, textbooks, paid any fees, got their locker assignments, and posed for student identification cards.

A team of parent volunteers helped move things along, but none of the kids seemed to mind waiting in line, because they were so busy catching up with friends.

Twin brothers Coby and Jonah Hart are both juniors this year and say they're glad to be back in school, so they have "something to do" after a long summer.

Coby Hart looks forward to seeing his friends, and Jonah Hart is excited about his classes, which include pre-calculus, advanced placement chemistry, physics, and marketing.

Juniors Corey Bissonette and Maddy Conkle are also taking a strong load of advanced placement classes and both are in leadership class as well, which means serving as a student officer.

"We get to represent the school and help the student body and share their voice," said Conkle.

The four juniors said they will find

time for clubs and sports, with Bissonette playing baseball and Jonah Hart on the swim team.

Corey Bissonette's brother Coby is playing cello in the orchestra and is going out for track and cross-country. Conkle is a varsity cheerleader. All of them say Wilson is a great school, with a friendly atmosphere. "Everybody here is so nice," said Bissonette.

Enrollment this year at Wilson is expected to be 1,327, a big jump from last year's 1,283 students. Erica Meyers, business manager, said they have 120 staff members, but they're hoping to hire
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Wilson business manager Erica Meyers assists parent volunteer Laura Joyce with her computer during fall registration. (Post photo by KC Cowan)

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