

Somali Refugee

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time job.

"She said that if you're mostly stress free, you'll raise healthier families," Saalim remembers. "I did not want to depend on others for free services."

Neighborhood House had an opening. It was a part-time temporary position in the food pantry but after his six-month evaluation, he received a higher salary, benefits, and it became a permanent full-time position.

"I was so happy!"

Neighborhood House has been helping community members in need since 1905. They serve families facing hunger and homelessness, help vulnerable seniors, and help children with school work.

Rick Nitti, executive director, explained that Somalians have been

in the Markham neighborhood since the 1970s. During the 1990s foreign students arrived and began attending Portland Community College and Portland State University.

Kurds soon followed after the Iraqi war. As the community grew, a mosque was built.

Somalis represent the largest Muslim group in the city. Somali has become the third most spoken native language in Portland schools. Most, if not all Somali refugees fled Somalia during the war. However, some came through neighboring countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya.

"From what I'm seen and experienced," said Nitti in his upstairs Multnomah Village office, "these proud people come from strong families with strong work ethics."

Neighborhood House offers a variety of youth leadership programs

to steer kids away from trouble or drug use. Connecting adults to permanent, satisfying careers is a main goal for the 110-year-old charity.

"The Portland Police Department recently hired its first Somali police officer, Khalid Ibrahim," Nitti said. Downstairs in the food box program, Saalim, who is now the assistant pantry coordinator, paused the interview to help a drifter looking for handouts. The pantry was closed and he was told to come back tomorrow.

"I can work in almost any situation," he said. "I've had to deal with

alcoholics, abusive individuals, and mentally ill."

He used to be a mediator in Africa helping families who were fighting or had other domestic issues. Saalim is studying for his citizenship which he plans to get after the five-year waiting period.

Saalim was asked what he missed about Africa.

"Some friends and relatives," he responded, "but that's about it."

And what does he like about the U.S.?

"Health care, security, education."



Saalim Saalim runs the Neighborhood House food pantry. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

Wilson High School

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one more English teacher, to help keep class size around 24 students.

"In 2007-2008, we had a skeleton crew," Meyers explained. "But we kept building and now we have more staff, more secretaries, and more electives, like video production, yoga mindfulness, and sound engineering."

There are 12 instructors who are new to Wilson this year. Some are replacing teachers retiring, but some have joined the staff because the school district had more money. That allowed Wilson to offer unique classes like sports marketing.

Fall sports include football, cross-country, soccer, and volleyball. On registration day, students were going through drills on the field trying out for soccer teams.

One new addition to every sports program this year is the presence of a certified athletic trainer, courtesy of Providence Health Services.

Eight of the nine Portland Interscholastic League high schools now have a licensed trainer on site,

whose job it is to prevent injuries, help with rehabilitation, and making sure students don't play with injuries.

The arts are well represented, too. Wilson will have choir, band, drama, drawing, ceramics, metalworking, woodworking, and photography.

On registration day, members of the drama club had a table set up to advertise their classes and encourage students to audition for the coming season, which will include "Antigone" and the musical, "Young Frankenstein."

In addition, Wilson offers students a chance to hone their writing skills on the Trojan yearbook or the Trojan Horse, the student magazine.

The video production department produced its first program before school even started – a special anti-bullying video that will be presented at an upcoming school assembly.

If the secret to a good high school experience is getting involved and "finding a group of peers," then students at Wilson should have no problem being successful. Erica Meyers summed it up best: "We're all super excited. Wilson is on fire!"

Neighborhood Association meetings. Those meetings represent the best opportunity for diverse viewpoints to be aired and discussed.

Ideally, all members of the community – residents, business owners, developers and investors – would be encouraged to express their thoughts and participate in lively, meaningful discussions with mutual appreciation and respect.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts in writing. I look forward to continuing the dialogue on important issues facing our community.

Kathleen Kuba
Multnomah

Interview with Abdi Muse about the Somali community



Abdi Muse, center, takes a group of friends and family to a local park. Muse, who has a master's degree, works in the Multnomah County Health Department. (Photo courtesy of Abdi Muse)

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

Abdi Muse was born in Somalia and came to the United States in 1996. He serves on the Neighborhood House board of directors and has been working for the Multnomah County Health Department since 2002. Abdi has a master's degree in engineering management from Portland State University.

The Post: When I mention the Somali community, what comes to mind?

Abdi Muse: I think about their desire to live independently without outside assistance. Oregon is a popular state to resettle because of the abundance of humanitarian programs for immigrants. This support comes in the form of English classes, job support, food aid, and housing.

Q: Where does the Somali community reside?

A: There's no one single area where all the Somalis live. Most of them are from Somalia but some came from Kenya and Ethiopia. Many live near the Rizwan Mosque (9925 SW 35th Drive). Anywhere from 500 to 1,000 Somalis live in southwest Portland. This is about 300 families. There are approximately 8,000 to 9,000 Somalis living throughout Oregon.

Q: What are the biggest concerns of this community?

A: The No. 1 issue is unemployment. Some are educated and could be an engineer or a doctor but the training and requirements don't transfer. Many resort to driving cabs, housekeeping, food processing jobs, janitorial, and hotel industry jobs.

The No. 2 issue is housing. Section 8 housing (rent subsidies for low-

income households) used to be easy to find but gentrification has been affecting affordable housing. Rent is at least \$1,000 a month plus utilities and other living expenses.

The waiting list is unbelievable. Many have had to move to Gresham where it's more affordable and [this] disrupts the support networks.

Q: What is your role in the community?

A: When I met Rick [Nitti, executive director of Neighborhood House] he asked me if I could help this community by being a gatekeeper and community connector as a bridge from Somalia to Portland.

Q: What would you like our readers to know about Somalis?

A: Newcomers have trouble integrating into a new culture. There is shock and identity crisis. There are some disparities between the children and parents. The elders like the old way and traditions. Some of the youth can be influenced by gangs or other troubles. I began troubleshooting with the police, translating, identifying the laws of the U.S.

Q: What is the latest news from Somalia?

A: Federalism (based upon democratic rules) has been introduced. The south is still in turmoil but the Chinese keep coming and investing in the country. An election was held for the first time in 25 years.

Q: Do you miss Somalia?

A: First of all, it's three days of travel to get there so not really. Oregon is home now. I want my Starbucks. In the U.S. there is still a dream and you can make anything happen with hard work. It can only happen in America.

Letters to the Editor

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more diverse demographic.

I, too, love the charm of Multnomah Village but our neighborhood association has a history of opposing infill and development in general. By taking unilateral stands, alternate opinions are disregarded.

For instance, I live close to the Freeman Tank and am one of several neighbors who do not oppose development of the former Water Bureau property by Renaissance Homes, but none of us attended neighborhood association meetings.

So I applaud you, Sermin, for your intent to attend Multnomah