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challenge.”

“There are many legal and statutory barriers that make everything much more difficult,” he said.

Duane de la Vega said the restaurant industry isn't the only area of employment she's been targeting during their tour. While in Portland, she held a second screening where representatives from the manufacturing, construction and tech trades were invited.

Skvarla said while restaurants and construction trades are some of the most accessible for inmates just coming out of prison, they aren't necessarily the best fit for every inmate.

“There can be some sketchy stuff that happens,” she said, such as employers who fail to pay their workers in full or on time, or environments rife with alcohol and drug abuse. “That's not necessarily the best place for somebody that's trying to learn how to be professional and trying to learn how to be in a more stable environment,” she said.

But, she said, the more professional the atmosphere is at the restaurant or jobsite, the better the outcome will be.

Skvarla, whose nonprofit connects business leaders in the community with inmates at Columbia River Correctional Institution, said Oregon needs to do more inside its prisons to prepare inmates for real careers once they're released.

“As a society, we are not helping anybody gain the hands-on skills that they need to be in a new career,” she said. “There is a gap between what we expect from inmates reentering society and what we prepare them for. A lot of the guys have really good people skills, but they don't necessarily have the professional technical skills to back it up.”

She explained that at Columbia River Correctional Institution, there are 600 inmates, but only about 10 computers. “And that's no fault of the department's, that's just been the way it is. As taxpayers, we are the ones who have to demand that that stuff changes,” she said.

She said any business leader, owner or manager who is interested in sharing their knowledge with inmates can do so with her program. All it takes is a three-hour time commitment to come in and give a presentation. But, she said, presenters typically choose to come back and do it again.

“Really, the point of that is for business executives to get in there and see that there are really smart people in prison,” she said. Often relationships will develop organically, giving the inmate professional connections upon their release who might be able to help them network or even offer them employment, she said.

Restaurant owners and managers who are interested in participating in the industry night job fair at Columbia River Correctional Institution in January, or business leaders and entrepreneurs in other industries who are interested in working with A Social Ignition's other programs inside the prison, should contact Skvarla by email at: [sonja@asocialignition.com](mailto:sonja@asocialignition.com).

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**'Dreamers' exhibit celebrates hope with art***Silent auction of portraits to benefit organization working with undocumented immigrants*

**BY SARAH HANSELL**  
STAFF WRITER

**H**eldáy de la Cruz came to the U.S. from Jalisco, Mexico, when he was just 2 years old. He learned English at the age of 5. It wasn't until he was 15 when his undocumented status really hit him for the first time. He wanted to learn how to drive, but he couldn't get his permit.

“That was the first wall I hit,” de la Cruz said.

An artist and aspiring designer, he worked hard in high school, hoping for private scholarships, since undocumented immigrants do not qualify for federal aid. He received a scholarship for the University of Portland. But because he couldn't take out a federal loan to pay for the rest, he had to turn it down.

“As a DACA recipient you work your ass off in high school hoping to get something, some sort of aid,” de la Cruz said. “And I had to turn (the scholarship) down. That was a real bummer for me, having to face all these realities – these walls that I kept hitting.”

When the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, or DACA, was enacted in 2012, he was nervous to apply. DACA is a program established by the Obama administration granting temporary protection against deportation to some undocumented immigrants who entered the country as minors. DACA can be renewed when it expires every two years and allows recipients to qualify for a work permit.

“I just felt like it was a really great achievement, but it was also really scary to have to come clean and give the government your fingerprints and your address,” he said. “Eventually I did it, my parents convinced me to, and I'm really glad that I did. It was life-changing. I was able to live normally.”

Since becoming a DACA recipient, de la Cruz went to school at PCC for graphic design, and got his dream job at Ecotrust as a graphic designer.

In September of this year, however, the Trump administration issued a deadline to rescind DACA, which would strip protection against deportation from almost 800,000 people. The implementation of the repeal has been postponed for six months to allow Congress to make a plan to address the current DACA recipient population.

As a response, and in support of DACA, de la Cruz is hosting an art show Dec. 1 called We The Dreamers, which will feature his own illustrations of 10 DACA recipients, along with their stories. The event will also include a silent auction, speeches, a special musical guest, a DJ, a bar and an afterparty. Proceeds from the event will benefit organizations working to support

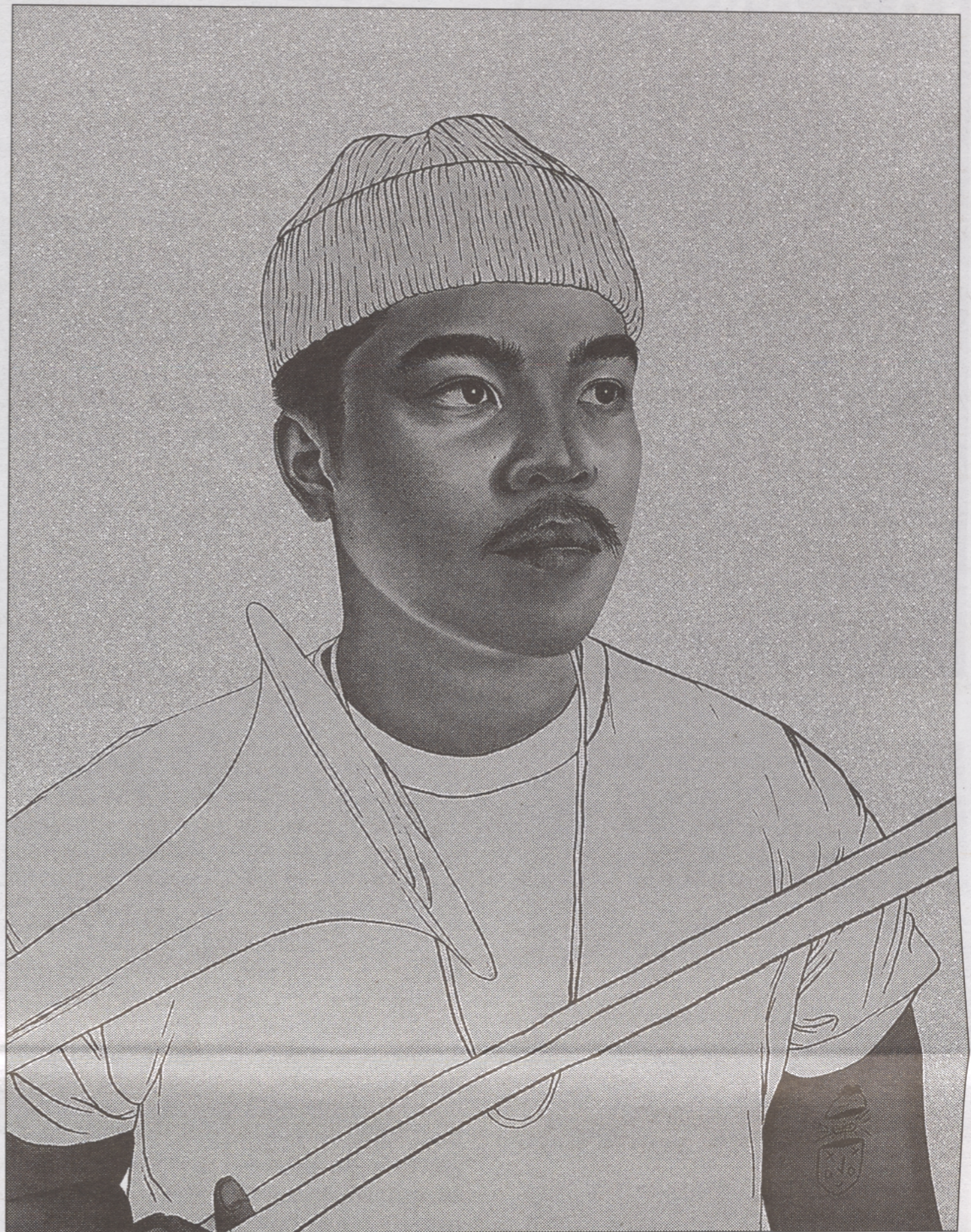


PHOTO COURTESY OF HELDÁY DE LA CRUZ

Heldáy de la Cruz's work "Denzel," one of the 10 portraits for the gallery portion of the We the Dreamers exhibit. Denzel is a DACA recipient and musician in Portland. Denzel's story will be printed alongside his portrait at the show.

**IF YOU GO**

**What:** We The Dreamers: An Art Show to Defend DACA. After party at NYX, \$10 at the door

**When:** 7:30-11 p.m. Dec. 1; 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Dec. 2

**Where:** Ecotrust Building, 721 NW 9th Avenue #200, Portland

**Tickets:** Eventbrite, search "We The Dreamers."

undocumented immigrants on the national, state and local levels – respectively United We Dream, Oregon DACA Coalition and Pueblo Unido.

“We live in secret for so much of our lives about all of that, we don't talk about it. It's a scary thing to do,” de la Cruz said. “But then we're given this sort of gift (with DACA), and this really amazing thing that changes your life drastically.”

“And then to have that just taken away again is really frustrating. And I personally feel like I have just lived that secret life for so long and I don't want to go back to that, there's nothing there for me anymore. I feel really empowered by DACA and I want

to stand up for it. I'm the right person to fight for it. DACA recipients are the right people to talk to.”

Alex Vallé, another DACA recipient who will be the subject of one of de la Cruz's illustrations for the event, came to the U.S. when he was 7 or 8. He fell in love with art in middle school and took all the art classes he could in high school. He graduated from Madison High School class of 2014 with a 3.5 G.P.A., 11 extra credits, and four college credits.

He had to decline a full-ride scholarship to University of Oregon's design program because as an undocumented immigrant, even with DACA status, he could not receive federal aid.

High school, Vallé says, was the hardest time of his life.

“From my perspective it was just like, ‘you're from here, I'm from here.’ I didn't know what it meant,” he said of being an undocumented child. “I didn't think ‘because you're from here you get this, I don't get this.’ I never saw it that way until I understood how things worked, how FAFSA, how funds, how money worked.”

He said many people he knew dropped

**See DACA page 14**