

# Education

## Schools programs for violent students

BY LEE PERLMAN

Once upon a time, violence and guns officially did not exist in Portland Public Schools. Now, in an effort to make this image a reality, those deemed likely to engage in such activities are sent to Project Pax.

The program provides schooling and training for up to 40 district high school and middle school students who have been expelled from Portland School District schools, either for violent acts or for bringing weapons to school. The total population is divided into two groups, with the division based on the student's academic "function level," according to director Jean Berg. They receive a traditional school curriculum, but also group and individual training in Anger Management, Conflict Resolution, Problem Solving and Empathy Training.

Students spend 45 to 90 school days at PAX, depending on their assessed needs. After this, they may enroll for the rest of the year at one of several alternative school programs, including Open Meadow Learning Center or Albina Youth Opportunity School.

The program represents a reaction toward the inner city youth and gang violence Portland has seen since the mid-1980s, and perhaps a loss of innocence. In the mid-1980s, when southern California-style gangs first began appearing in Portland, the reaction of the school district, like that of the city, was denial. For

instance, a shooting at Grant High School in 1987 was dismissed as an isolated incident that could have happened anywhere, and the school's parent advisory committee expressed annoyance at the media for suggesting the school might be anything but safe.

By 1994, when the PAX program was conceived and funding was secured through a federal Safe Schools grant, the pendulum had swung the other way.

At that time the school district had five levels of disciplinary action, ranging from a disciplinary conference to expulsion for short periods, never more than one semester. In that year congress passed the federal Gun Free School Act, which required any district that received federal assistance to expel any student who brought a gun to school for at least a year.

Portland added a discipline level six, which implemented the federal requirements and added to them. Students can be expelled for a year for bringing other weapons to school or fighting with their fists if there are repeated offenses, or even just one if the circumstances are serious enough. For the district, also, a BB gun is treated like any other firearm; appear at school with one once, and you are gone for a year.

"As far as the district is concerned, a gun is a gun," Berg says. "A BB gun can kill people. Someone who brings one to school is making bad choices. With the num-

ber of shooting nationwide, we feel a need to take a hard line on this. People need to feel safe in school."

Not only in school, but even near it. PAX was originally sited at the portable facilities of Monroe School, 2508 N.E. Everett St., site of several alternative school programs. Neighbors and the Kerns Neighborhood Association were concerned about the presence of students deemed too dangerous to attend public school, and particularly about the way they came to school. The district had them arrive by public transportation or other means with no special safeguards. Unable to get satisfaction for their concerns, the Kerns Association successfully challenged the district's right to use the portable, and made them seek a new conditional use permit.

The district seemed to get the message. It installed the DaVinci School, a magnet arts program that is a sort of prep for Jefferson High School's famous magnet, at Monroe, and moved PAX and other less popular programs out.

PAX is now located at the old Whiteaker School building on Northeast Columbia Boulevard at 47th Avenue, a remote, primarily industrial area. Most students come by school bus. Parents of guardians must receive prior permission to drive students to school, and they must escort them into the building rather than simply dropping them off.

In addition to PAX's special train-

ing curriculum, students receive individual counseling on their academic subjects. "When a teacher has 30 students and 42 minutes to complete a class, there isn't an opportunity to offer individual attention," Berg says. "We find that when students aren't able to keep up with the classroom work, they act up and act out. We teach them ways to get the work done so that they are feeling successful."

Not all students who receive level six expulsions fit this profile. John Canda, formerly of the Youth Gang Outreach Program and now of the Portland Police Bureau, told one recently gathering, "We're seeing the second generation of kids with guns. These are kids who aren't gang members, who aren't criminals, who just want to be left alone, but feel they need guns for protection."

Told of Canda's comments, Berg says, "We tell them that there are other choices. We tell them, 'Yes, guns may make you feel safe, but are you ready to kill? Are you putting yourself at risk by having a gun?' I don't think there are any students who come through this program that can't benefit from it."

Perhaps, but hard evidence is missing. The program's budget does not include funding to track its graduates to see how they progress once they return to school. Berg says, "I have anecdotal information about our students, but I have no hard data, and I'd love to have it."

## High school dropout rate dips slightly

Oregon's high school dropout rate declined slightly last school year. The Oregon Department of Education reported that 7.2 percent of all Oregon students in grades 9-12 dropped out during the 1995-96 school year, down from 7.4 percent 1994-95. The one-year rate translates to 26.6 percent four-year rate for the Class of 1996.

"I am pleased our dropout rate is headed in the right direction, but it remains totally unacceptable," said State Schools Supt. Norma Paulus. "A school system must question itself when more than 25 percent of its students don't complete the process."

Oregon students who dropped out last year cited irrelevant course work as the number one reason for leaving.

Paulus said the state's improved economy is luring high school students," she said. Noting that the

State Board of Education set high academic standards last fall for the Certificate of Initial Mastery, Paulus said, "Schools need to beef up their curriculum and give students hands-on experience in the workplace."

Scott Mutchie, superintendent of Bend-LaPine School District which has a dropout rate of 4.2 percent, agrees.

"We're changing our high schools to create more opportunities for kids to meet success," said Mutchie. "By providing career experiences that complement the classroom, students see the relevancy of what they're learning in school."

Bend High School Principal Dottie Bertelli said, "We have conscientiously worked to keep school relevant and to make it extremely difficult for a student to simply walk away."

## Older adults helping school children

The Experience Corps is a volunteer program for adults age 55 and up aimed at improving scholastic achievement and the overall quality of life of school children.

Participants serve in teams based in elementary schools, performing a variety of tasks that they have been identified as critical needs.

Currently three Portland elementary schools are being served: Kenton, Humboldt, and Lent.

A range of opportunities are available for anyone who cares about our public schools and wants to make a difference:

- team members are 55 or older and can serve anywhere from 1 to 20

hours a week. Some members spend a substantial amount of time in classrooms providing one-on-one assistance, while other members may "adopt" a school need and develop a plan to help meet it. Stipends and transportation reimbursement are available for members who serve 15-20 hours a week.

- Volunteers are any age and assist mainly with special projects.

Experience Corps is a great way for older adults to be involved in community service, share their wisdom, and use leadership qualities gained from experience.

Call Doug at 249-0469 for more information.

## Two Oregon students, one teacher receive national awards

Two Oregon high school students and a teacher are among 39 high recipients of the American Dream Award from the National School-To-Work Opportunities Office in Washington, D.C. Each will receive \$2,500.

The scholarship program is designed to help students reach their career goals and to support educators' and mentors' innovative school-to-work activities.

The 19 student winners include Angela Sargent of Milwaukie High

School and Deena Scheidt of Thurston High School in Springfield. Kathisue Summers, a teacher at Rogue River High School, was one of 20 teachers or mentors named.

The awards were established last year at the request of JD Hoyer, director of the National School-To-Work Opportunities. Hoyer, a former associate superintendent for the Oregon Department of Education, was chosen by Miss America 1996 Shawntel Smith to receive the Miss America Organization's Woman of Achieve-

ment Award, which included a cash prize of \$100,000. Hoyer designated the money to establish the program.

The program will help students to get the skills to compete in the 21st century through higher education or additional training and will enable educators and mentors to pursue staff development to better prepare tomorrow's workforce.

Nominees from across the U.S. were judged on their judged on their demonstrated commitment to school-to-work principles and practices.

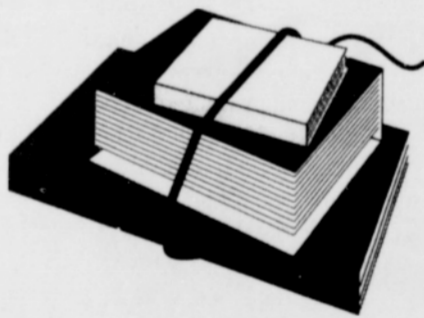
## Central library to return home

TransCentral Library staff begins packing for move back to Central; books in stacks now unavailable until Central Library opens April 8.

The move back to Central Library has begun. Library staff at TransCentral Library (located at Fourth and Columbia in downtown Portland) have begun packing up the thousands of books in the stacks.

Trucks will start moving the books to the newly renovated Central in a day or two.

Books in stacks will now be unavailable to the public until Central Library opens on April 8. "Since before Christmas, library



staff have been notifying schools, colleges and other groups of library users about this early phase of the move back to Central and that materials will become increasingly more available as time goes on," says Library Director Ginie Cooper. "We know many people will be inconven-

ieniced at each stage of this very complicated move and we apologize for this."

Library service at TransCentral Library will continue until 5:30 p.m. on Friday, February 28.

Both TransCentral and Central libraries will be closed from March 1 until April 8.

Library staff will ask the community to "Help Move the Books!" on Tuesday, February 11 from 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

Stacks of books will be ready for library cardholders to check-in.

Move helpers will also get a first glimpse of the renovated Central's first floor lobby area. More information available soon.



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## Student Exchange seeks host families

The American Intercultural Student Exchange, a non-profit educational foundation, is seeking local host families for high school foreign exchange students for the 1997-98 school year.

Every year, AISE places thousands of exchange students with host families throughout the United States.

AISE exchange students live with American families and attend local high schools during their ten month cultural exchange. American host families provide these young ambassadors with a room, meals, and a loving, family atmosphere in which to live.

AISE students are eager to learn about our government, history, customs and language, while at the same time leaving a lasting impression of their cultures in the minds and hearts of their American host families and peers.

Call AISE at 1-800-742-5464 or visit the AISE web site at <http://www.sibling.org> for more information on hosting a foreign exchange student in your home.

## The Piedmont Lighthouse

The Piedmont Lighthouse, a new after school program local in the lower level at the historic Piedmont Friends Church, now known as Lighthouse Church of God in Christ, 5736 N. Albina Ave., Portland, OR 97217, (503) 247-9445.

The Piedmont Lighthouse will receive children 5 through 12 years old, 3pm-5pm, Monday through Friday.

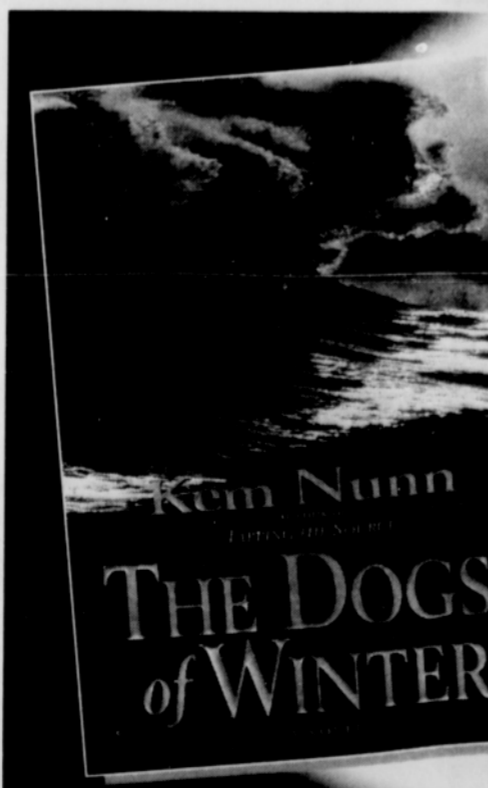
The core of this program teaches Peace and Progress by supporting awareness of the virtues--the gifts within, problem-solving, conflict resolution skills, (including anger management) and responsibility to studies.

- Daily schedule:**
- 3:00-3:45 p.m., Circle Time
  - 3:45-4:05 p.m., Wash hands, snacks 'n' manners and clean up.
  - 4:05-5:00 p.m., Homework, open activities and play
  - 5:00-5:20 p.m., Store time
  - 5:20-5:30 p.m., Tidy up/collect belongings
  - 5:30 p.m. Children take leave as arranged

If you are interested in our program, please feel free to contact Zan Tabor-Stone at 247-9445.

Volunteering: If you are avail-

able to read stories, take field trips with our students, or commit any portion of your week to our youngsters, please fill out a volunteer application.



Heart Attacks is California's last secret spot--the premier mysto surf haunt and the stuff of rumor and legend. But the rumors also make clear that one must cross Indian land to get there. Ken Nunn's novel, *The Dogs of Winter*, is the story of what happens when down-and-out photographer Jack Fletcher and big wave legend Drew Harmon attempt to ride these waves long known as too big, too cold, and too deadly. Disaster comes quickly as an Indian boy is drowned and word spreads to the interior of the reservation where men and idle hands and a taste for mindless violence decide on vengeance.

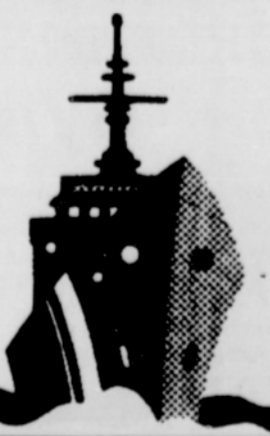
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