

Girl Scouts Go Beyond Bars

continued ▲ from Front

troop as opposed to girl who just come with adults during visitation."

Besides being able to visit their mothers, the girls get to participate in regular Girl Scout activities, like hosting tea parties, learning about safety and trust, and camping in the great outdoors. The Beyond Bars program also works as a support group, knowing that the other girls around them are in the same situation parent-wise.

Learning life skills and being involved in this program helps break the chain and keep girls out of the same type of trouble their mothers got into. Statistics show that children with incarcerated children are six times more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system when their parents are in jail, due to factors like low self-esteem, anxiety, low motivation, aggression and drug abuse.

"We found that if incarcerated women can remain in contact with their daughters, it helps in reducing recidivism," Noble said. "You have some inmates in which it's a generational issue where the grandmother was incarcerated and the mother is incarcerated."

One recent Saturday, the program allowed The Portland Observer to join a joyful reunion.

The women in the medium security prison don't look like they've broken laws. Crimes range from identity theft to drugs to manslaughter, but it all appears that they're more like independent soccer moms leading their troops. They're your neighbors whose kids play with yours. Mainly, like any mother, they're just happy to see their children.

One woman in the middle of an 11-year sentence has her 10-year-old niece visiting her.

She cherishes the one-on-one time with her young family member.

"We get to interact here. I can carry her on my back if I want or sit in the tent and read books," the woman said. "I left when she was young and I'm able to reconnect with her even though I'm gone. I want her to still know me as her auntie. I can be a role model even though I'm in here."



PHOTO BY KATHERINE KOVACICH/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
The Girl Scouts hold the attention of an incarcerated mother and her daughter during a group activity at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility.

We found that if incarcerated women can remain in contact with their daughters, it helps in reducing recidivism.

—Anita Noble, Girl Scouts Beyond Bars program coordinator

She said it's important that the young girl sees her in a stable environment, because when she left, "it was a big bad scene. She gets to see me as the kind, normal person I am. I was bad, but she can see the change."

The inmate said her niece's visit helps keep her out of trouble.

"It gives me something to look forward to," she said.

Another inmate who has spent two years at Coffee Creek with 14 months to go has an 11-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old sister that come to visit her when they can.

She said it helps for her daughter and sister to see the women she's

around on a daily basis, to "see that it's not a scary environment so they don't worry." She also praised the Girl Scouts for having the ability to organize and structure the program, gathering girls from various places.

A third inmate at Coffee Creek said her 15-year-old daughter appreciates being able to see her mom on an individual basis.

"It gives me a chance to visit with my mom and do activities," the teenager said. "It's important to stay close to her while she's in here. "It makes me feel good because everybody needs a mom. She gives me advice."

Her mother said the Girl Scout visits are much more bonding than a regular visitation.

"I want to keep what we had," she said. "Since I've been in here I've grown a lot and she's gotten to know me as a 'square' person, as she says. I've gone through parenting classes and learned effective communication tools."

Noble said that the need for more volunteers in Beyond Bars is great, especially for African American women. Help is needed in driving the girls to Coffee Creek and to be mentors for the girls. For more information on how to get involved, call 503-598-6504.



You can't 'beat' the freshness and beauty of vegetables at Portland's Farmers Market.

Early Harvest: Farmers Market set for a long season of events

For 13 years, the Portland Farmers Market has been successful at bringing the urban shopper and the country farmer, together. This year is no different.

Beginning this month until late fall; the park blocks next to Portland State University will host Farmers Market events every Saturday. Area residents will find local produce from vendors, but also demonstrations and free talks led by local gardening experts as well as chefs from some of Portland's finest restaurants.

In an effort to make the market a family friendly environment, there are kids' cooking events every fourth Saturday of the month.

This year marks a record ninth-month season for this non-profit organization; usually the events don't start until May.

The market is successful at educating Portlanders about eating from the earth to be healthy but to also how to conserve resources.

For information about Farmers Market call 503-241-0032 or visit www.portlandfarmersmarket.org.

Pride Banquet on Tuesday

The North Portland Salvation Army will host their 9th annual Community Pride Banquet on Tuesday, April 12 at 6 p.m. at its Moore Street center, 5325 N. Williams Ave.

People who make north and northeast Portland a great community for living and working will be honored in a new category of awards, titled "Ringing the BELL

for the Salvation Army and Neighborhood Pride."

Jerry Moss of the Trail Blazer organization will serve as Master of Ceremonies. Jazz musicians from Ethos and the Martin Luther King Jr. elementary chorus directed by Kathy McVey will provide the musical entertainment.

For more information please call 503-493-3925.






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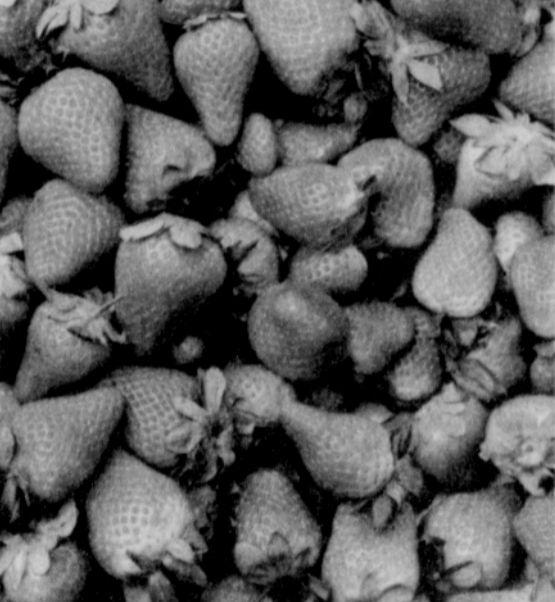
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