

METRO

The Portland Observer

Veteran Actor Honored

Samuel L. Jackson cemented in Hollywood history

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SECTION B

Community Calendar

Earn College Credit

Clark Community College in Vancouver invites high school students and their parents to learn about a "Running Start" program to earn college credits while in high school. A forum is scheduled Wednesday, Feb. 1 from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in the Clark College gym at 1800 E. McLoughlin Blvd.

Women in NAACP

A special meeting of Women in NAACP will be held on Sunday, Feb. 5 from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the American Red Cross Building, 3131 N. Vancouver. For questions, call 503-249-6263.

Business Meeting

North/Northeast Business Association meetings are on the first Monday of each month from 6 to 8 p.m. at Albina Community Bank, 2002 N.E. Martin Luther King Blvd. Morning networking meetings are the third Wednesday of each month from 7:30 to 9 a.m. at the Blazers Boys and Girls Club, 5250 N.E. Martin Luther King Blvd.

Work Against Abuse

The group Community Advocates invites those interested in protecting children from abuse to become a volunteer support team member. For more information, call 503-280-1388.

Free College Outreach

The first Saturday of each month, from 12 p.m. to 2 p.m., high school students can get free help from Oregon State University on preparing for any college at the Matt Dishman Community Center, 77 N.E. Knott St.

Go Red for Women Rally

Put on something Red and join the American Heart Association's Go Red for Women Rally on Friday, Feb. 3 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The event starts at the Pioneer Place Shopping Center, Atrium Concourse Level (by the food court) on Southwest 5th and Morrison, Downtown. For more information call 1-888-MY HEART or visit www.GoRedForWomen.org.

Aquatic Fitness

Providence offers a variety of fitness classes including water exercising at the Providence Aquatic Center, 4805 N.E. Glisan. For a schedule, call 503-215-6301.

African Drumming, Dance

The North Star Ballroom, 635 N. Killingsworth Ct., hosts beginning drumming and Ghanaian rhythm classes on Tuesdays at 6 p.m. On Wednesdays, intermediate drumming is offered in addition to an African aerobics and dance. Chata Ady teaches all classes. For more information call 503-632-0411.

Red Cross Teaches Safety

The American Red Cross offers a range of safety classes for crisis situations, from learning how to baby sit to performing CPR. The courses are intended for children aged 8 through adult. For more information visit www.redcross-pdx.org.

Parenting Classes

Newborns don't come with instruction manuals but parents and parents-to-be can attend classes through Providence Health Systems to learn about a variety of topics from pain and childbirth to breastfeeding to infant CPR and much more. For a schedule of events, call 503-574-6595 or visit www.providence.org/classes.

36
years of
community service



The first South African film to be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film and the first film shot in the Zulu language, "Yesterday" is the poignant, compassionate story of a young rural mother coming to terms with having been infected with the HIV virus and worrying about the future of her daughter.

Cascade Festival of African Films opens Friday

The 16th Annual Cascade Festival of African Films, held in honor of both Black History Month and Women's History Month at Portland Community College Cascade Campus in north Portland, will run from Friday, Feb. 3 through March 4.

The festival will offer five weeks of films from the African continent and the Diaspora. All films and related events are offered to the public free of charge. Most of the films will be followed with



"Africa through African lenses"

discussions led by visiting film directors and local individuals from the film's featured country.

The festival will open with the acclaimed Angolan film, "The Hero/O Heroi" directed by Zézé Gamboa, on Friday, Feb. 3 at McMenamins Kennedy School, 5736 N.E. 33rd Ave. There will be screenings at 5 p.m., 7 p.m., and 9 p.m.

"The Hero" won the Grand Prize in World Dramatic Competition at the 2005

Sundance Film Festival.

A special festival highlight will be films on the African legacy in Mexico. On Thursday, February 9, Mexican film director, Rafael Rebollar Corona, will present and discuss his film, "The Forgotten Root," which focuses on the rarely noted history of the African presence in Mexico. Mr. Corona's AfroMexican trilogy, "The Forgotten

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A Tradeswoman in a Man's World

Finds success despite sexism

BY SARAH BLOUNT
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Debra J. Darco spent her childhood in an unforgiving social system, statistically destined to become just another victim of foster homes and life on the streets. As an adult, she faced a firing squad of sexism, simply by choosing a career in welding.

But for the past 28 years, Darco has used the metallic sparks from her welding torch to find salvation from blind ignorance and hatred.

Darco was raised in Portland foster homes, followed by a flirtation with homelessness and jail. At the age of 21 she considered welding, hoping a six-month training program would be a positive change. She discovered she was a natural.

In 1986, she went to work for Wagner Mining in Portland. Getting hired was easy for Darco because of affirmative action laws, but her legal protection didn't extend into the firm's "good old boys" network of men who felt she was taking a man's job.

"The hard part was trying to prove myself over and over again to absolutely anybody," she said. "I would have janitors come up and look at my welds."

In 1990, a machinist at Wagner indecently exposed himself to Darco. She reported the incident to management, and after an investigation the employee was terminated.

Darco also filed a police report. She met with a prosecutor, but hit a brick wall when she was told no law had been broken. In Oregon, indecent exposure is illegal in public, but not on private property.

"I collected myself and said I guess I have a law to write," she said.

Darco was placed in touch with Deputy District Attorney John Bradley, and together they spent evenings in his office, writing an indecent exposure law. Darco contacted a



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Veteran welder D.J. Darco spent years proving herself. Now she's helping women overcome gender barriers in skilled trades.

The hard part was trying to prove myself over and over again to absolutely anybody. I would have janitors come up and look at my welds.

state representative and eventually proposed two house bills, one was an amendment to include "work places" in public places, and the other would create the crime of indecent exposure. Both bills were introduced but never passed.

In the meantime, Darco continued to work

at Wagner and received support from management, but some of her co-workers became more aggressive and unsympathetic. She needed security escorts and carried a weapon after threats on her life. Her despair grew when her mother died, leaving her with no family and no support.

Her response was only to improve her skills. She became a better welder, striving to out-perform her 300 male co-workers. Her life's goal was a single focus: refusal to give up.

"I worked circles around the guys," she said. "I knew my job and I knew it well."

Eventually, Darco's hard work in a hostile environment came to fruition. Some of her co-workers began bringing their wives and daughters in to talk to Darco.

Talking to other women and providing them a voice gave Darco strength.

"I believe it heightened awareness that

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