

Event Set on Creating an Even Playing Field

Film festival breaks down barriers

BY SARAH BLOUNT
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A former Portland resident found it was easier to help people find their niche when his own discovery was a long time in the making.

That's how it happened for Desmond Faison, 30, whose athletic skill helped him succeed at Benson High School and carried him through college, but was never meant to be his true niche.

Now a Los Angeles filmmaker, Faison spends his days writing, directing and editing. Most recently he's working with his partner, Bree Dennis, to organize their inaugural event – the NiCHE Film and Music Festival – a four-day, three-night festival taking place downtown from Thursday, Aug. 16 to Sunday, Aug. 19 at the Standard Insurance Building, 900 S.W. Fifth Ave.

You won't find two people more confident of the direction they're headed than Dennis and Faison, who named their nonprofit event NiCHE because of the numerous opportuni-



PHOTO BY SARAH BLOUNT/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Bree Dennis and Desmond Faison will host this weekend's NiCHE Film and Music Festival, an event open to actors and filmmakers with an array of experience.

ties in film and music.

They aim to create an even playing field for Portland filmmakers of all ages, experience, socioeconomic statuses and ethnicities – eliminating, they say, the red line between the groups of "haves and have-nots."

"This is what our festival is about," Dennis said. "Helping people find their groove."

Faison, who splits his time between Portland and LA, knows all about finding a niche. As a younger man he was fairly adept at finding his groove as

quarterback at Benson, earning a scholarship that carried him through Montana State University in Bozeman. But after graduation, football was no longer the answer, and Faison found himself wondering what was next.

"A lot of people get pigeonholed early

on in life, especially young males," he said. "You play football or basketball, and it almost engulfs you."

In 2005 he reconnected with Dennis, a friend of his who grew up and still lives in Portland. Dennis, 30, said she was impressed with Faison's work and thought some financial backing was exactly what he needed. With a naturally talkative disposition and background in sales, she began wrangling investors and getting financing, all the while falling in love with film craft.

The duo created NiCHE as a nonprofit and began to organize the event that Dennis proudly calls her life's work before the age of 30. They wrapped up the final details just months ago and now await in anticipation of the long weekend of films, parties, workshops, mentoring and music.

Dennis and Faison chose Portland as host city for logistical reasons and because word of mouth spreads fast in this close-knit community, but also because of tax breaks for filmmakers visiting Oregon.

"Portland is on the verge of being a film and video Mecca," Faison said.

The two-person crew hopes to make NiCHE a premiere annual event for Portland. For more information about NiCHE, visit nichefestival.com.



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Creole Jambalaya Dinner

The dinner was New Orleans style at the Martin Luther King Loaves and Fishes Center for Saturday's Authentic Creole Jambalaya Dinner. Helping out for the second annual event was David Lomax (from left), Lyda Overton, Xanthe Enos and Wilma Alcock.

Seniors Prepare for Fishing

The Urban League of Portland is holding its annual Fishing Derby on Friday, Aug. 17, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Hagg Lake.

Seniors will travel to the coastal range lake for a full day of fishing, picnicking and recreational activity. The community elders will also vie for the "catch

of the day" award for hauling in the biggest fish.

The Urban League has been helping obtain fishing licenses that allow senior Oregon residents to fish for free for the rest of their lives.

For more information, contact Koriani Baptist at 503-280-2632.

Sisters Tackle Nonprofits

The local activist group Sisters in Action will benefit from a series of readings on Monday, Aug. 20 at 6:30 p.m. at In Other Words bookstore, 8 N.E. Killingsworth St.

The event will question whether sustainability or a po-

litical edge is compromised as community activism becomes a profession.

As a former director of Sisters in Action, Amara Perez will share her experience of building a nonprofit organization dedicated to youth-led organizing.

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