

Diversity Embraced on Killingsworth

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ralization process but still wanted to run some type of headquarters for cultural transition. Her solution combines the need for an immigrant gathering space with cravings of the city for ethnic food.

Damtew's attention to detail is impressive, and it seems quite likely that she will succeed just with the excitement of neighbors. But city officials would like to see Killingsworth follow Alberta and Mississippi's destination status.

It's unclear whether we have learned how to prevent dispersal that can come with gentrification. As with other streets, officials see street improvements currently underway on Killingsworth as the "ground floor" for increasing its tax base.

High property values on the street may mean that only establishments with high volume can survive, leaving them sensitive to the whim of the market. The street also could use businesses that offer other types of goods that the community needs, but it has attracted a few quality food outlets recently, and that's a good start.



BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Sonya Damtew, owner of the E'Njoni Café, 910 N. Killingsworth St., demonstrates how olive oil and bread go with a hot fava-bean dish topped with fresh minced vegetables, as restaurant patron Debbie Bemnet looks on.

Ethnic Restaurant Invites 'All to Come'

E'Njoni Café opens on Killingsworth

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

African-immigrant activist turned restaurateur Sonya Damtew hoped to create a sense of home for people who come to her E'Njoni Café., a new African/Mediterranean restaurant at 910 N. Killingsworth St.

After opening the doors just last month, a steady stream of customers has already found an atmosphere of offers more than just authentic food.

Working for the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization helped Damtew understand the difficulty of finding foreign cuisine in Portland with much cultural competency.

"We don't have a whole lot of restaurants around here that reflect the tradition besides just the food," says Damtew, who decided to build the café with much more than a nod to the practices of her homeland. Every piece of art of the walls represents a carefully thought-out piece of African history and culture that she is more than willing to talk about.

Coming from Italian colonized Eritrea on the coast just north of Ethiopia, Damtew recognized the need for a site in Portland that accepted just as many African and Mediterranean influences. She says, "The name

(E'Njoni) itself means that: 'All come,' so everyone feels welcome, and it's great to hear so many languages being spoken."

Through her immigrant activism, E'Njoni began "as kind of a joke," she says, "I started gathering in churches and mosques in the area, and people were saying, 'Sonya, you should start a coffee shop or something.'"

When Damtew took the idea seriously enough to look into a full-on restaurant, her mom reportedly thought she was crazy because it was so different from the kind of work that she had been doing before. Damtew contended that she often had to coordinate large meals for immigrants through the center, and making that a business wouldn't be too much of a jump.

A good location and a wildfire word of mouth among Portland's immigrant community gave a stroke of luck to Damtew, who says, "Without having to do a whole lot of work, we opened it up, and it got busy." The quality of the food also may have something to do with it, as Damtew carefully considers each ingredient.

The butter, for example, is not just a specialty store-bought item, but

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Vanport Square Near Complete



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

When Living Color Beauty Supply moves into the new Vanport Square complex just down the street from Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard later this month, demolition will begin on the corner of MLK and Alberta Street to make room for the new Magic Johnson 24-Hour Fitness, a signature sports facility with two gymnasiums that will take up the entire block.

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Leary defended himself and his plan, only to see the calling center anchor drop away. The PDC granted several extensions of the development deadline, but they became visibly uneasy about the project's lack of progress and the agency's commitment of \$10 million in cash and tax credits.

It was the lure of the commercial-condominium concept that finally allowed the project to succeed, even without a major retail anchor.

"It was the chance for ownership that was the catalyst," Leary says. "People will happily pay to own their own space at a rate they would balk at to rent that space." Even so, it wasn't an overnight

success.

"Each deal was a challenge in and of itself" he says. "We had to fight financial constraints and politics. Vanport used all nine of its lives."

That it succeeded was due not just to Leary and Woolley's perseverance and the validity of the concept, but the loyalty of their backers.

"It comes down to relationships," Leary says. "We were able to establish champions that saw this as vital to PDC's mission and jumped into our corner. We also had buyers who signed on five or six years ago and

stayed with us every step of the way."

The community and the city have just begun to realize the potential for this sort of business self-ownership, Leary says.

Commercial rents on MLK are now running in "the high teens" per square foot. Leary said in order to make major redevelopment possible, it would have to climb to about \$25 per square foot, "and we're not there yet." But they are getting closer; the Magic Johnson Fitness Center is paying the same rate for its space that it would pay in other parts of

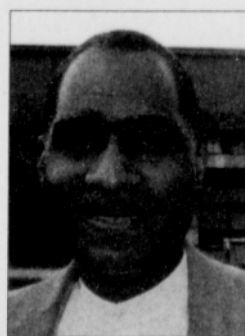
the city.

He said ownership opportunities are a premium that can increase the value of development projects.

"This will be a catalyst, not just for small, infill development, but for larger projects. It will bring privately financed development to MLK. You'll see projects that are attractive enough to lure regional and national companies," Leary says.

Would Leary have signed on to the Vanport Project back in 1999 if he had foreseen what eight years would bring?

Smiling ruefully he says, "I'm glad I didn't know what was coming. The converse is that ignorance kicked into perseverance and that eventually led me to opportunities I'd only thought about."



Ray Leary

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The Book of Obedience, quoted the most by Jesus

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OTS 101 *Old Testament Survey, I Jim Sellers, M.Div.
Genesis through II Samuel

CH 202 *Church History David Brown, M.Div.
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TUESDAY

BF 101 *Inductive Bible Study Alan Cushway, ThM, M.Div.
Develop skill for independent Bible study and teaching

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Major religions, their teachings and daily life practices

WEDNESDAY

NT 101 *New Testament Survey I Rob Robinson, D.M.
Matthew through John

GE 111 *Basic English Connie Stanton, B.A.
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NT 209 *The Kingdom of God in the Teachings of Jesus
Beth Nance, M.Ed M.Div. Explore whether the Kingdom of God is present or future

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UM 209 *Ministries to Urban Families Linda Thompson, MSW
Learn strategies to assist inner-city families with special needs.

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NT 209 Greek Grammar Daniel Willard, BANT
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