



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Music instructors and students from the non-profit Ethos, Inc. line up outside the Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center for a group photo as the music education group makes a bid to take over the community venue from a failing theater and arts gallery. Pictured are (front row, from left) Harmon Laurin, Michele Anderson and Michelle Boss Barba; (second row, from left) Charles Lewis, Jedidiah Chavez and Daniel Santiago; (third row, from left) Betsy Brumm, Beatriz Santiago and Luis Romero; and (fourth row, from left) Patrick York, Wanda Wright, Peter van der Meulen and Amy Vanacore.

Rescue Bid

continued **▲** from Front

cated on the corner of North Killingsworth Street and Williams Avenue, is financially healthy, and already has many close ties to IFCC, which it considered merging with five years ago.

Portland Parks and Recreation owns the building, and has contracted with IFCC to manage the space. It's currently looking for a new tenant, according to PPR spokesperson Beth Sorenson. At press time, she didn't know how many, if any, other groups had applied or had plans to occupy the space. However, she did say that PPR is looking for someone who will carry on the IFCC's mission.

Much of the spotlight has focused on the IFCC's long-standing financial woes and unsteady leadership, following the news that it couldn't keep its doors open.

But the center- which was established in 1982 by the Charles Jordan, Portland's first African American city commissioner- has been a pre-eminent place for emerging artists, particularly artists of color, to showcase their work, hone their skills, and gain exposure.

The atmosphere is somber, as staff members put cardboard on the edges of paintings that once adorned the walls just a few weeks ago. Boxes containing works of art are packed up, as the IFCC, which has nurtured countless artists prepares to close its doors.

Sitting in her second-floor office, Adrienne Flagg, the center's outgo-

ing creative director, explains that the IFCC has been a part of her life since nearly its inception.

"I grew up here as a kid," said Flagg, who recalls taking acting classes shortly after it opened its doors.

Flagg, who spent time on the East Coast developing her chops as an actress before returning to Portland and becoming its creative director in 2005, said that early on the IFCC was one of the few venues to host productions that took on issues of race and gentrification, often with casts composed largely of minorities.

"Portland is a very white town, and if you go and look at plays there is over 170 producing companies in Portland. So there's a lot to see, but it's being produced by a pretty narrow window of people in a certain age range and a certain ethnicity," said Flagg. "And without any sort of mindful programming, we're going to lose a lot of our diverse artists that we do have"

Each year, a committee would sift through the proposals received by the IFCC to use its 99-seat theatre, its art gallery and dance studio. The center put on 1,400 productions by artists who were required to pay a nominal fee in exchange for the chance to show their work to the 20,000 people who visit the center each year.

Flagg said that the center has helped further the careers of artists like Adrienne Cruz, a visual artist who received a fellowship in 1998 and whose work now can be seen at

MAX stops in north Portland. It also helped serve as a launching board for BaseRoots Theatre Company, which focuses on the African American experience.

Heidi Durrow, who is gaining national attention for her novel "The Girl Who Fell From the Sky", remembers the IFCC as a refuge from the grit and peril that characterized much of north and northeast Portland during the 1980s.

"It definitely was the first place I was confirmed as an artist," said Durrow who first took a theatre class at the IFCC in 1983, when she was 13 years old, and is saddened to hear of its closure.

The IFCC has also provided art classes to local elementary schools and paired Jefferson High School students with working artists who serve as their mentors.

"Right now, there isn't going to be somebody in the Portland visual or performing arts scene that is specifically, mindfully seeding the pipeline with diverse artists," said Flagg.

Local artist Bobby Foucher said that he had been so involved in performances productions and teaching classes at the center that he has a hard time keeping track of it all.

"It was a launching pad for a lot of artists and groups," said Foucher.

The IFCC has always been dependent on the city to subsidize its shoe-string operations, and was contributing about a third to the non-profit's roughly \$300,000 budget.

Last year, rumors swirled that the cash-strapped city was going to cut its budget entirely, before an outpouring of support prompted City

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