

CAREER & EDUCATION

Peace Prize for Unsung Hero

continued from front

For months, the students worked to decide who, of the 20 nominees they selected, will receive the second annual Portland Peace Prize, which will be announced on Thursday.

The students in the senior inquiry class selected people dedicated to stopping hunger, reducing conflicts and crime, supporting civil rights, and for their perseverance in helping people throughout the city secure a better life.

Students rarely have the opportunity to hear inspiring stories of people who make a difference, explained Brady Bennon, one of three teachers of the course. "As a social studies and history teacher, I know so much of what students learn is pretty cynical, so kids have become cynical about the world and their community," he said.

The course, which includes 33 students, covers English, History and Economics and is taught by two high school teachers and a PSU college professor.

"It's a great feeling to know that we are planning an event that will change the life of someone who constantly changes other peoples' lives for the better," said Blair Robertson, a student event planner in Jefferson's senior class.

The idea for the Portland Peace Prize first began while Bennon was teaching an elective course at LEAP high school around the same time President Obama was awarded the International Peace Prize.

Inspired by the way Peace Prize winners overcame barriers of peace and democracy world-wide, both he, and the students, began to wonder if it could be possible to have local versions of the award as a way to give recognition to the contributions of courageous individuals and organizations within the local Portland community.

"Every year there is only one Nobel Peace Prize awarded," said Bennon. "And for all the work that actually happens on the ground, that is not a lot of recognition."

Bennon explained, the more he thought about it, the more he realized the project is a great way for students to look at these issues first-hand within society.

"It's really amazing to watch the students get inspired by the impressive and unsung leaders in the community," said Bennon. "They start to believe in the community they're in, and I think they are getting excited about giving back to the community in their own way."

While visiting their class on Friday, students expressed their excitement for prom, which was com-

ing up later that evening. But even with all of the anticipation of the weekend's events, their attention was fully occupied once the bell rang at 8:15 a.m., with their verdict of who will be the recipient of the award coming closer to finalized decision.

Bennon opened the class with a warm up exercise, which asked the students to choose criteria for what they personally believe is the most important attribute of a peace prize recipient. In the discussion that followed, the students explained they respect individuals who are determined and create the ability to overcome obstacles to the barriers often existent within society.

"To create peace you have to be passionate about what you are doing," added Jazmine Thompson added during the exercise.

Bennon explained that this year the students began the project by forming small groups and selecting a former International Peace Prize recipient they wanted to investigate.

Melissa Woods, a student in the class at Jefferson, studied Nelson Mandela, whom she explained dedicated his entire life to the struggle against the African Apartheid.

She wrote essays and poetry, and read his biography "Long Walk to Freedom," which she said showed her the qualities she will look for when helping to decide who should receive the local Peace Prize.

"He sacrificed his entire life to create peace and democracy for his people," she said. "He never gave up and gave everything he had, even when he spent 28-years in prison. He just never gave up."

For every nominee, the students conducted an interview where they asked a number of questions prepared to allow them more insight into lives and work of the individuals and organizations on a daily basis.

"We are not just picking anybody for this prize," said SeQoya Tillman. "We are really trying to dig deep and find a person who is truly making a change and creating peace."

The class completed the last of their interviews with Debra Lippoldt, who was nominated for her work with the non-profit Growing Gardens, which builds garden beds for people with disabilities and low income families.

In the interview, several students asked questions, including what influenced her to become a leader within the community; what was her definition of peace; and who would she nominate for a peace prize.

Lippoldt ended the interview by asking the students what has been the most enjoyable part of the project for them. Breana Vance explained,

"Reaching out to people who haven't been reached out to."

Throughout the project, the students have been able to learn real skills and take on leadership roles, which Bennon explained is rare in schools for teens.

Students can make a difference in the community by coming together and setting ideas," said Martiesha Lambert. "We are organizing an event that not only adults can do, but we are capable of doing ourselves. And I am so proud of our hard work."

The final peace prize winner will be announced during a special ceremony Thursday at 6:30 p.m. at the Ecotrust Building, 721 N.W. Ninth Ave. Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman will speak, as well as political singer and songwriter David Rovics will perform.

The session will recognize all of the nominees for the work they are doing within the city. A silent auction will include over \$400 worth of donated items from places such as Patagonia, Laughing Planet Café and Salty's Dog and Cat shop. All proceeds will be donated to the Portland Peace Prize winner's local non-profit of choice.

"More than simply giving props to someone, the Portland Peace Prize changes our culture at its roots to be more peaceful," said student Erica Maranowski. "Specifically, by honoring and placing a high-value on local peace work."

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