

Building Bridges to a Strong Future

continued ▲ from front

school, or they will never become whatever their dreams and aspirations are.

"But they want to be doctors, lawyers, teachers, and police officers," she said. "They want to help the community, but they need someone to help them realize they can rise above all of the negative words and become whatever they want to be."

And this, she said, is exactly what she intends to do—one child at a time.

Urban Bridges Studio will celebrate its 5th year anniversary on Nov. 6. Over that period, the organization has worked with more than 70 young girls and over 40 young men through classes, workshops and trainings available throughout the year.

Feathers said each of its two-month long programs serve as a safe place for youth to go after school, where they can learn how to boost their self-esteem through table etiquette instruction, how to conduct themselves at home and in interviews, modeling classes and image enhancement. The program also includes workshops with professional individuals from within the community who share their experiences as bank representatives, policemen, and teachers.

"What we do is offer more than a typical finishing school," said Feathers. "I work with the kids from the time they come through the door."

Feathers said she remembers the day almost two-years ago when one of her young pupils, who arrived with an enthused friend, walked through the door with her head down and fists clinched. "She was really afraid, and felt like she was a 'big girl,'" said Feathers. "I just thought to myself; you just wait."



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Founder of Urban Bridges Studio, Inc. Patricia Feathers and Denisha Craig sit inside Feather's studio in northeast Portland at a practice table where youth who participate in their 2-month long program learn etiquette and social skills to use within their own homes and within the community.

"By the time she graduated from the program, she was so much more loose, and her confidence has soared."

Feathers said, when the youth begin the program, they often have their shoulders down, a tough exterior and broken language. She said this is often because of their low self-confidence in themselves, and maybe they have been told all of

their lives they are too big, too tall, too short.

"I'll do whatever I need to do to help these kids," she said.

Feathers also said the program truly helps kids stay out of trouble. "A lot of our kids really need things to do after school," she said. "In Portland specifically, a lot of our youth join gangs and they turn to the streets."

The program, however, really helps give them something to do, she said. "Our program specifically increases their self-esteem, self-confidence, social skills and social protocol in the community, at home and in schools. It's a great way to learn how to love yourself."

Currently, delivery is available for the Urban Bridges bake sale

fundraiser, which will last until January. The program has survived on class fees and small donations, but Feathers said they are always accepting donations, and any amount helps.

For more further information about Urban Bridges Studio, Inc., and for a class schedule visit urbanbridges.org or call 503-493-9436.

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