

Haitian Roots

continued **▲** from front

and during that time discovered his family was alive and safe.

"Not only knowing, but being able to see that my family was okay; that was all that mattered to me at that time," Estanis said. "I spent the rest of the time working in hospitals and under tents with the team, translating and helping in any possible way I could. Being on the ground with a group of devoted people who can assist my community with their medical needs, and being there to facilitate that, was a big accomplishment for me; it's always good to give back to the community."

Today, Estanis is giving something back at Portland Commu-

nity College. too. He is the student speaker for PCC's 50th graduation ceremony at 7 p.m., Friday, June 15, at Memorial Coliseum.

As the college caps its diamond anniversary celebrations, a total of 4,200 degrees, certificates and awards will be handed out and about 700 students are planning to walk in front of thousands of friends, family and community members.

"It will be a great honor for me to have the opportunity to share my story with so many others who at one point or another in their lives have struggled to accomplish their dreams," Estanis said. "My story might be different from students who are graduating this year, but I know for a fact that we all have gone

THE LAW OFFICES OF Patrick John Sweeney, P.C.

Patrick John Sweeney
Attorney at Law

1549 SE Ladd
Portland, Oregon

Portland: (503) 244-2080
Hillsboro: (503) 244-2081
Facsimile: (503) 244-2084
Email: Sweeney@PDXLawyer.com



Ewald Estanis, with his flag of Haiti, marched with fellow Portland Community College students in the 82nd Avenue of Roses Parade.

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through so many barriers and difficulties in our journeys in order to be part of the PCC class of 2012."

The native of Les Cayes, Haiti said he will tell his story of assisting international aid organizations in his country which led to him meeting Gail Buck and Angelina Sams of Healing Hands for Haiti. From there, on their encouragement and his desire to study abroad, he traveled to Portland in 2009 to attend PCC as a business major.

"In spite of many, many obstacles, Ewald has persevered and succeeded," said Julie Kopet, dean of instruction at the Southeast Center and Estanis' nominator for graduation speaker. "I know that students, faculty and families will be moved by his struggles and his overcoming those struggles to become a leader and stellar member of the PCC alumni."

Kopet is right. Estanis, whose father passed away when he was 17 and was raised by his mother, has cultivated a 3.5 grade-point average while at PCC. The bumps in adapting to a new country were smoothed from the support he got at the college from instructors and staff, from District President Preston Pulliams and Southeast

President Craig Kolins, and from many others.

As a result, he has risen through the ranks of the student government Leadership Program to become the student body president of the Southeast Center. As part of his service, he got to meet with U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley and other elected officials recently in Washington, D.C.

Once he leaves PCC, Estanis plans to earn a bachelor degree in business with a minor in political science to allow him to set up businesses in Haiti and the United States. He is currently working on his first book, and even has plans to run for elected office in Haiti.

"I want to see what I can do for my community," he added. "To me giving back to the community doesn't necessarily mean you have to be president, but you have to be a responsible citizen. I want to run for my town's elected office, because I believe we have enough resources to satisfy the needs of my people. All we need now is to have just the right people in the right places. And my experience in America gives me a bigger vision of how prosperous my wonderful Haiti can be if all citizens contribute."