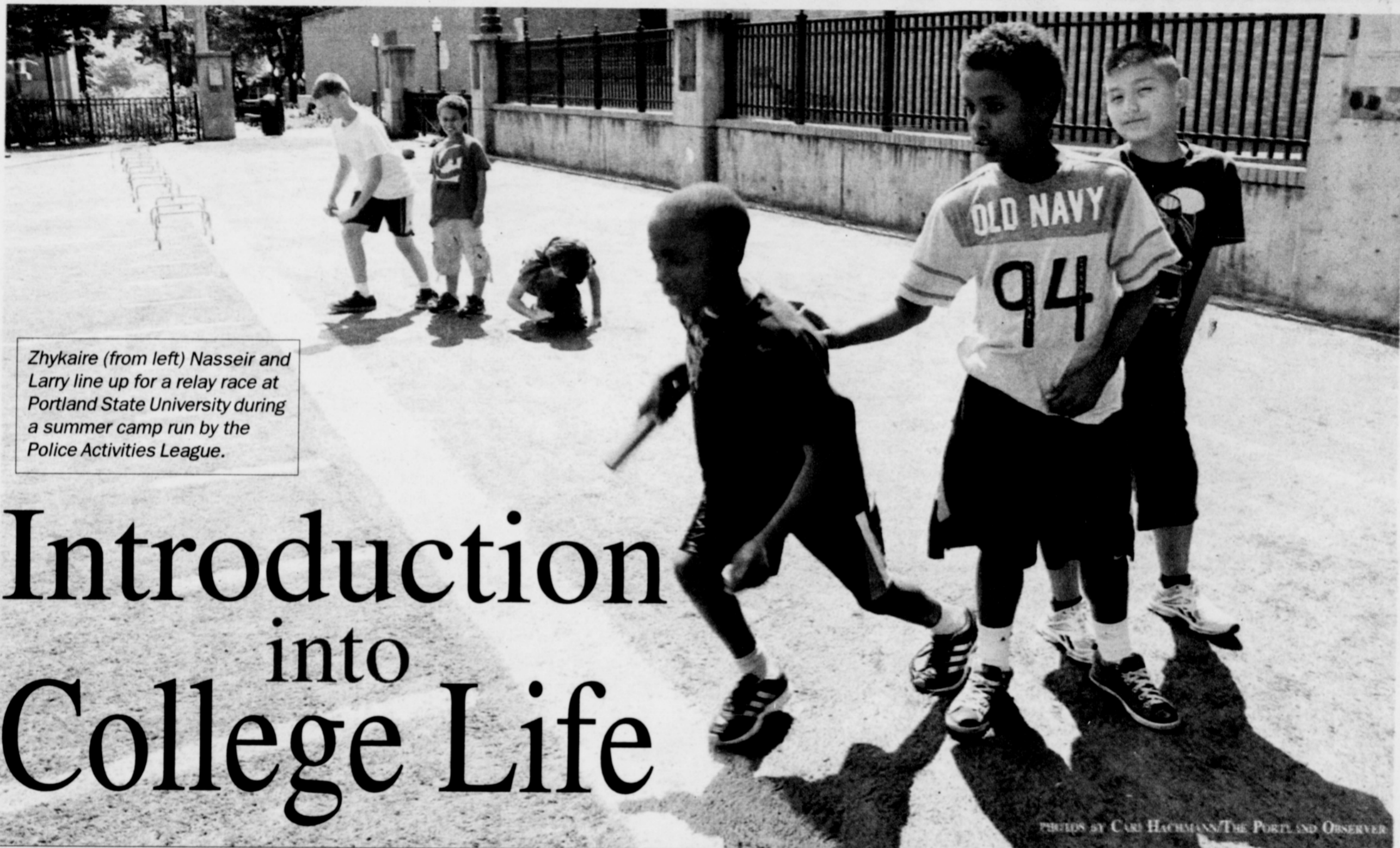


Mississippi
Alberta
North Portland

Vancouver
East County
Beaverton



Zhykaire (from left) Nasseir and Larry line up for a relay race at Portland State University during a summer camp run by the Police Activities League.

PHOTOS BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Introduction into College Life

Camp shows boys and girls the way to higher ed

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Just a few years behind the college-age students who surround them, a group of teenage boys walk coolly in two lines through the heart of Portland State University's tree-lined campus.

The young men are enrolled at the Police Activities League's annual National Youth Sports Camp, an educational getaway for kids who come from poor and disadvantaged families.

Considering many have never stepped foot on a college campus before, the boys' quiet composure is impressive and hopeful to the watching elders.

Lance Waddy, 27, a PAL camp leader and staff member of 15 years, said the camp gives kids who have never been on a college campus before an example of college life and how feasible it is to attend college.

Waddy says it may be that in many of these kids' homes, nobody is talking about college. Maybe mom or dad didn't go. "But if you're here for four straight weeks and you see people with your face in college, you know it's that easy to make the transition," he said.

Fives buses from Beaverton to Gresham were used to transport about half of the 410 low-income boys and girls who participated in the summer program. The youth are split up by age and gender into six groups that rotate throughout the day and around the college campus.

Camp leader Tommy Rudd, 25, was just nine years old when he hopped a bus to his first National Youth Sports Camp in 1996.

"I was really nervous," he remembers. At

that time, many kids his age were sneaking on buses and into camp just to spend a day away from home, off the streets and out of trouble.

Now, Rudd is one of the 90 percent of camp staff members who return every summer to help kids cycle through.

NYSP was created in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement to teach young minorities in the south how to swim as well as expose other underprivileged youth through sports to opportunities of higher education. Held at university campuses, the summer program spread nationwide.

For the past 19 years, PAL has held the camp at PSU, where the university donates over \$100,000 in services. At camp, an instructional swimming program is mandatory and kids participate in additional sports like basketball, football, track and field, soccer, bowling and dance.

Coach Paul Frazier has been coaching football at PAL and NYSP camp for 10 years, but says his main purpose here is not football. "It's education," he said. "I'm here to help these kids understand the importance of education. I just use football as a vehicle to get that across."

Frazier says kids revel in the excitement of being on a college campus, where university

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At Portland State University, Christian Nicolas, 11 (from left), Pedro Rondon, 11 and Jonathon Guerrero, 11, learn about healthy foods as one of their lessons during National Youth Sports Camp. The exposure to college life also gets them thinking about their futures, a goal of the summer camp.