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'City of Roses'



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Lessons in Conflict

*African films tackle
violence, prejudice
and cultural identity*

Portland Community College's Cascade Festival of African Films is going local.

The film festival is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a poignant local film about Somali girls from southeast Portland who come together to play basketball in a local recreation league. "Lessons of Basketball and War" also follows school principal Kevin Bacon, whose skills as an educator, leader and peace-maker are tested when the girls from the war-torn country are dropped into his life.

The documentary examines the roots of conflict between Somali ethnic groups and the challenges faced by those who attempt to resolve it here in Portland. The film has been an official selection for the 2014 Global Peace, Richmond International and Red Rock film festivals.

Portland writer, director and producer Ron Bourke, had the idea to make the movie after reading an article in the newspaper about a Somali girl's basketball team put together by Bacon while he was principal at Hosford Middle School in southeast Portland.

Bourke said "Lessons of Basketball and War" explores universal issues of violence, prejudice, cultural identity and conflict resolution as seen through the eyes of the girls, who are refugees from war and famine in Somalia.

The film shows how the team, mostly Muslim, dealt with the sexualized, celebrity-obsessed America and the issues of the ethnic animosity that followed them to America from Somalia. The documentary follows a year in their lives and those of the educators and volunteers who helped them. The film will be shown at 2 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 28 as part of the festival's Student Fest Matinee at the Moriarty Auditorium on the Cascade Campus in north Portland.

"I'm honored to have my film featured at this year's festival and I am glad to have a screening here in Portland so that many of those involved with the production can have an opportunity to share it with family and friends," Bourke said.

"Lessons" highlights a busy festival, which will feature 34 films and host 10 visiting film directors in February. The Cascade film series is the longest-running annual African film festival in the United States and runs from Friday, Feb. 6 through Sunday, March 8 and shows films ranging from full-length features to documentaries and short films.

Kevin Bacon's skills as an educator leader and peace-maker are tested when a small group of girls from war-torn Somalia are dropped into his life. 'Lessons of Basketball and War' is one of 34 films featured in this year's Cascade Festival of African Films.

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