

A Rightful Place

CONTINUED FROM FRONT Black United Fund of Oregon holds its space and plans to stay. Zoe Piliafas, founder of both Art Uprising and Vox Siren, said she approached the organization in December after walking past the Black United building and noticing it standing

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PHOTO BY OLIVIA OLIVIA FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Tokyo-born artist Jeremy Nichols, the Portland co-creator of the new mural for the Black United Fund building at 2828 N.E. Alberta St., sits on scaffolding as he adds paint to the nearly 100 foot long image.

amidst the changing landscape of gentrification. Piliafas had hopes of creating more visibility for communities of color on the rapidly changing street and specifically women of color.

“Visibility to history is key,” she said. “Vox Siren is working relentlessly to dismantle sexism and create spaces in which women can thrive. We support organizations in creating spaces that attract, retain, celebrate and support the many contributions of all women. Our sister organization, Art Uprising, is the perfect partnership to bring us the lives and contributions of women through art. This mural will be a beacon of inspiration, history and possibility in Portland.”

The project quickly gained traction within the community thanks in part to in-kind donations and eventually a grant from the Region Arts and Culture Council. The organizers also got local people of color to help them create artwork that would reflect the history of the black community and pay tribute to members who have managed to stick in the area and some who have left.

Vox Siren has already ac-

complished a lot of work in the community, having recently launched a digital management system to rural parts of Oregon and Washington to ensure that girls and young women have access to empowering programs in science, technology, and mathematics. Piliafas also explained that her organization had worked with the U. S. military on analysing rape culture and sexual assault that affects workers.

The Black United Fund of Oregon and its black women leaders helped inspire the mural and are gearing up for its public opening and celebration in early August.

“In our more than 30 years of operation, the organization has always been led by women,” said Kimberlee Sheng, executive director of the Black United Fund. “Therefore it is fitting that this mural would pay tribute to a few of the iconic black women of the civil rights movement. Upholding a beacon of hope for all, these historical women stood alongside our brothers and numerous communities involved in the struggle, just as we still do today.”

The official mural release party and celebration will be held on Saturday, Aug. 8 from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Black United Fund, 2828 N.E. Alberta St. DJ Deena Bee, will be spinning live and there will be activities for the kids. Local black-owned food carts will be selling meals along with other communities of color.

Powerful women leaders including Kimberlee Sheng, the executive director of the Black United Fund of Oregon; Tiffani Penson, city of Portland Minority Evaluator Program and Supplier Diversity Officer and a Black United Fund of Oregon Board Member; and Zoe Piliafas, co-founder of Vox Siren; will be speaking about the impact of the Black United Fund; the importance of collaboration to make progress; and the influence of women in the past and going into the future.

For more information about the mural or getting an invite to the Aug. 8 celebration, readers are encouraged to write to engage@voxsiren.com or visit artuprising.org. To learn more about the artists, visit plasticbirdie.com and Eatcho.com.



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