Juneteenth

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entertainment will include music from the Kirk Green band; the Calvin Walker band; Nefasaria and The Future; spoken words events and more.

"There's a lot of buzz this year and we think it's going to be bigger than ever," Rush said. "We're hoping this is going to be a huge success and that it will be great for Portland."

Portland's Juneteenth celebration has gone through some ups and downs since Ms. Clara Peoples first announced it in 1945, over a loudspeaker in the Kaiser shipyards. Ora Lee Green, a teacher organized the first citywide celebration at Holladay Park in 1972. The event soon added a parade and moved north to Jefferson High School. For a while the celebration lost support because of its connections with Yam Yam's restaurant, whose owner was convicted of dealing cocaine in 2009. Now, a new committee has formed, under Rush's leadership. Current committee members are: Ms. Clara Peoples, Ms. Ora Lee Green, Doris Rush, Tim Hall, Karen Smith, Calvin Kyles, Sandra Hasty-Blacknall, Kirk Green, and Jerry Foster. A former bank employee turned project manager, Rush says the new committee is hard-working, and full of fresh energy.

"We now have a really committed and skilled group of people," she said. "We've worked really hard to make this community feel comfortable with this event. We pride ourselves on our transparency, and we want Portland's Juneteenth to grow into a three-day event as it is in other parts of the country."

The Juneteenth Portland Committee's vision would add a dinner with educational scholarships for students on Friday, before the Saturday Freedom Parade and celebration, and also a 'Gospel Explosion' on Sunday.

Ministers

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police our way out of the it…everyone has got to be involved. We have been lacking the community piece so it's very inspirational for me to be here and see all of you.

"Right now we have summer to get through… it's going to take a lot of work to get out there and make sure these kids have something else to do, something to hope for."

Captain Kevin Modica told the community to claim the public space. "Take up the space," he said, "Occupy what is yours. Be a voice of reason."

Derriel Ingram, a graduating senior from Benson High School, said peer pressure is hard to resist when adult support is lacking. And he pointed out that students gravitate to gangs in middle school when they are just 11, 12 and 13 years old.

"I've seen my friends go to prison and their lives are pretty much over because when you get a felony on your record you can't get a job," he said. "If you don't have someone on your side telling you 'Don't do it!' then you don't see the point of not doing it."

Derriel, who is the son of Rob Ingram, the director of Portland's Office of Youth Violence Prevention, explained how devastating it is to be viewed as a threat, simply because you are a young Black man.

"I walk down the street and people cross the street," he said. "It makes you feel like something is very wrong, you feel lost," he said. "It makes you feel like you are not part of society."

John Canda, for Connected, spoke about the power of being a positive, visible presence in the community. Being that friendly caring person for minority youth is a ministry of place and ministry of presence, he said. But he warned against working for others to the point that you neglect your own family. He plans to bring his high school-aged son with him once a week, he said, when the group gathers to offer that visible street presence..

Chabre Vickers, director of community relations and diversity for Big Brothers Big Sisters, Columbia Northwest, talked about the impact of mentors. And the urgent need for volunteers to step into that role. "We have about 2000 children on our waiting list who want a mentor," she said. "They're waiting right now and all we need is you."

Some mentors work with gang-affected youth through the nonprofit's Second Chance program. Mentors are crucial when youth are released from detention, she said, and can make the difference between falling right back into old patterns or leaving the juvenile justice system for good.

Bishop Steven Holt spoke about the strength of traditional Black culture and the transformative power of prayer. "Prayer is the great equalizer," he said. "It can change the atmosphere, grip hearts, arrest your attention and turn somebody around.

"Prayer is incredibly powerful."