

Microloans cont'd from pg 1

King managed to bootstrap her way to launching Royalty Spirits' first bottle, Miru — a refined, pear-flavored vodka named after the Cook Islands goddess of Polynesian mythology. Royalty Spirits is also the first vodka company on the West Coast owned by a Black woman.

owned; the majority are below 50 percent of the area median income.

The non-profit was originally known as MEND, or Micro Enterprise Neighborhood Development, a program of the Black United Fund of Oregon. In April 2008 it became MESO under the Pedagogy Institute.

“You're a high risk as a new business. Traditional banks are just afraid if you're a startup”

“I always wanted to produce something that was for women, by women,” said King, who comes from a decade-plus career in human resources. She describes her vodka as “not syrupy”, but smooth and flavorful with a kick.

King came to understand what women like in a drink after years of bartending in the off-hours of her day job.

In 2015, she won the Portland Development Commission's Startup PDX Challenge, which connected to MESO, Micro Enterprise Services of Oregon. That's when the ball got rolling for King.

MESO was established in 2005 to assist in developing commercially viable businesses with an emphasis on minority and underserved entrepreneurs.

It does this by offering micro-loans — the smallest on record is \$100 and the largest \$275,000 — to a wide range of businesses that include food services, child care, small manufacturers, arts and culture and much more.

Sixty-eight percent of MESO's clients are women-owned businesses and 38 percent are Black-

Last month, MESO made a splash in the micro-lending market by receiving \$1 million from the Small Business Administration. The capital will help finance an additional 20 to 40 small firms in Oregon and southwest Washington with loans up to \$50,000.

To date, MESO has granted micro-loans to 297 businesses, at an average of \$7,000.

In today's climate, just a few thousand can make a crucial difference for a small company that lacks the assets and the credit.

“They usually don't have enough collateral, and they don't have a history in borrowing,” said MESO's executive director, Nita Shah. “Many times the banks reject these business owners, even though their businesses are growing and they have a strong cash flow.”

While small businesses accounted for 64 percent of the net new jobs created between 1993 and 2011, startups have an 80 percent chance of getting turned down for a bank loan, according to national data.

Read the full story at TheSkanner.com

Roosevelt High School Senior Takes 3rd Place in National Monologue Contest

Back from a whirlwind weekend in New York City, the August Wilson Red Door Project is proud to announce that Roosevelt High School Senior Alexis Cannard brought home the 3rd place prize at the national August Wilson Monologue Competition National Finals at the August Wilson Theatre on Broadway. Alexis wowed the judges with a monologue from August Wilson's play “King Hedley II” as the character “Ruby,” the same monologue that awarded her 1st place in the Portland Regional Finals this past February. Fellow Portland Regional Finalist Jazanna-Marie Riddlesprigger also brought her no-nonsense, tell-it-like-it-is performance of the character “Berniece” from *The Piano Lesson*. These two students put our city on the map, putting us on par with heavy-hitting cities such as New York, Atlanta, Chicago, and beyond. In addition to her title, Alexis took home a \$1000 cash prize, and all participating students received the American Century Cycle collection of plays and a copy of Samuel French's new publication, “Dangerous Music: The American Century Cycle Monologues.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUGUST WILSON RED DOOR PROJECT

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learning center's teaching staff. “It didn't matter how long it took me. They were there to guide me every step of the way.”

Today, McLeod has two jobs and will soon be graduating with an honors degree in criminal justice from Portland Community College.

Thousands of others in McLeod's position having been coming to Londer since it was launched in 1993 by the late Multnomah County Circuit Court judge Donald H. Londer.

As a program of the Change Center at the Department of Community Justice, the Londer is the only of its kind that offers free high school equivalency classes to adults in transition, many of whom come recommended by a parole or probation officer, or through a drug and alcohol treatment program.

But by the end of the month, the Londer Learning Center — which costs the department \$600,000

per year and has provided some 1,200 GEDs — could be gone for good.

\$3 million in budget cuts

Due to the uncertainty of both state and county budgets, the DCJ

“It seems ridiculous to cut something like that. It will probably never come back”

is looking to cut close to \$3 million from programs in the upcoming fiscal year.

“We think that the Londer Learning Center staff and the program is excellent, but when we're in a budget cut situation, we have to look at what we're here to do,” said Truls Neal, Deputy Director of the DCJ, adding that the department's primary mission is community safety.

If the LLC gets cut, the county is relying on other resources to pick up the slack, such as PCC, which Neal said is looking to offer its GED program at a lower cost to parolees.

Furthermore, he added, PCC campuses are closer to where most parolees and probationers now live — in the East — not downtown where Londer is located.

But Londer supporters say adults with felony convictions or a history of addiction will be hard-pressed to come up with even low-cost tuition, let alone navigate a college campus.

Another resource is Southeast Works, a community career center that offers a free GED program to people under the age of 24.

Yet that doesn't serve the bulk of students who filter through Londer, most of who are well into their 30s and 40s, argues its backers.

Read more at TheSkanner.com

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reached for comment for this story.

“I'm actually optimistic that most of what was in the original bill was going to make its way back in, notably a prohibition on business on businesses adding dirty engines to their fleets,” Dembrow said. “That will solve one of our immediate problems, which is the fear that older engines that are prohibited in other states are going to find their way here.”

In 2015 the Oregonian reported that trucking companies trying to unload 350,000 diesel trucks that no longer met emissions standards in California had found willing buyers in Oregon. Peveto noted Washington's clean air regulations also exceed Oregon's.

Peveto said if SB 1008 is restored and passed, advocates are particularly eager to upgrade school buses as well as TriMet buses, the majority of which run on diesel, making TriMet “the dirtiest public transit system on the West Coast,” she said.

Dembrow also wants to ensure minority- and women-owned small contracting businesses are given flexibility and assistance upgrading their

“People need to remember that this settlement didn't fall into our laps out of anywhere. This is blood money. This isn't free money”

equipment — which often rely on a small number of diesel trucks or other vehicles to run their businesses.

“Any engine built after 2007 is required by law to meet environmental standards,” Dembrow told *The Skanner*. “Diesel engines last a long time, which is a good thing in some ways, but if you're trying to move away from older, dirtier technology, that's a real problem. Smaller firms are going to purchase the least expensive piece of equipment they can.”

The restored bill would also require that the bulk of funds be spent in parts

of the state that are most at risk to assist vulnerable populations.

Peveto said the state needs to create a community decision-making board

to make sure low-income and minority populations actually have a say in how the money is spent.

That sentiment was echoed by Dayna Jones, a legal intern with OPAL Environmental Oregon, which — with Neighbors for Clean Air — has been campaigning for the bill's restoration and passage.

“The fact that we have this funding mechanism right now, we just can't let go,” said Dayna Jones, a legal intern with OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon. She was blunt on the need to ensure the Volkswagen settlement comes



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEIGHBORS FOR CLEAN AIR

Senate Bill 1008, which would use funds from the landmark Volkswagen settlement to implement tougher clean air regulations, has been stripped of everything but the funding mechanism. Mary Peveto, co-founder of Neighbors for Clean Air, and other activists are hoping it can be restored.

with a strong regulatory mechanism.

“I think a major problem is looking at the settlement as free money,” Jones told *The Skanner*. “People need to remember that this settlement didn't fall into our laps out of anywhere. This is blood money. This isn't free money.”