

Roots Festival Celebrates Diversity

Event to heat up PSU Park Blocks

BY CHARITY PRATER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

People of all backgrounds will come together to celebrate diversity on the Portland State University campus for the third annual Roots Festival, sponsored by the multicultural student groups.

The festival will heat up beginning at 10 a.m. Thursday, May 22 on the South Park Blocks. Activities will then continue until 8 p.m. The celebration will include local music and dance, international cuisines and a variety of multicultural artwork.

This year's theme is "Diversity in Politics and Activism," which will educate and inspire the community to embrace civic engagement and a multicultural perspective in political action.

"We are going to have local, hip-hop artist Lifesavas performing, and our first community mural that the community will participate in creating," says Leah Meijer, Roots Festival coordinator. "When it's finished, it will be on display in the Portland State University library."

The Roots Festival has a full day of fun and entertainment scheduled including reggae music, DJs, Native American dance, hip hop and Latin dance lessons.

"The Festival gives us a chance to explore our roots by celebrating and recognizing our similarities," says Meijer.

Stopgenocidenow.org will display "Camp Darfur" at the event, a mock refugee



Native Americans from Painted Sky Northstar are among the diverse groups to perform Thursday at the Portland State University Roots Festival. Pictured are Colt Nicol of the Cree nation, Mary Bodine of the Warm Springs tribes, Betty Stephens of the Dine/Yakima nation, Rebecca Friedlander of the Atnabascan native Alaskan nation and Reggie Johnson of the Umatilla tribes.

camp aimed at raising awareness of genocide and the current crisis in Darfur.

"The art installation will show visitors through photos, histories, questions, maps, and DVDs what happens during genocide and what people can be doing now to end the current ethnic cleansing in the Darfur region," says Katie-Jay Scott, community outreach coordinator of Stop Genocide Now.

Camp Darfur was invited to participate because of its work to ignite social change and raises awareness.

"This year's theme of diversity through politics and activism supports the idea that art, music, dance, and dialogue are great ways to honor a culture, but can also be used as a tool to preserve, cherish and ensure a culture's survival," says Scott, "Camp Darfur works to create community between those who can bring an end to genocide in Darfur and the victims of the genocide in Darfur."

The annual festival is always held on Thursday because that's the day of the week when the most students are on campus.

"It's difficult to determine how many people will attend since many simply drop in or walk through," says Meijer, "But we are expecting more people than usual since we have such a fantastic schedule of events planned."

Other noteworthy events will include a speech from Charles McGee about his non-profit Black Parent Initiative, Mike Struwin will be performing acoustic roots music, the PSU Breakers will perform with DJs and Eatcho will be painting live.

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"We seek answers to the questions of why there is so much racial discrimination," says Zach Freeman is a junior at PSU and a Roots Festival coordinator. "Why is there is so much man-made pollution and an overwhelming lack of tolerance for difference in the world? This day is a chance to celebrate our flourishing differences in concert."

PSU is the most diverse student body in Oregon, representing approximately 25,000 students.

For more information, visit the Roots Festival's website at rootsfestival.groups.pdx.edu/index.php.



The Portland hip-hop group Lifesavas will perform at Thursday's Roots Festival on the Portland State University Park Blocks.