

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo



Sunday Parkways

There are 1,000 ways to integrate new Portlanders into the life of our city. Exactly one thousand ways. Right ways.

There are, ask anyone, many-many more *wrong* ways to receive American newcomers. Like, dropping off our bewildered parents in far eastside Portland apartment blocks, food stamps and Section 8 housing coupons in hand, into areas already densely settled by already marginalized families. Or, like: Leaving immigrant kids vulnerable to all those awful influences everybody already knows will certainly predate on them, then predictably deposit them into one after another of those numbing default institutions already set up for them — our child welfare system, our juvenile justice system, and just down the hall, Oregon's adult criminal system. Failed (and endlessly expensive) systems, all.

But this column's not about any of that. This story's about doing it right. It's about one example of those thousand good uses of government mentioned a moment ago.

This example — Sunday Parkways — is made of three primary ingredients, and not one of them is more money. Here's the winning formula. Easily replicated. Imagine doing it a thousand times over. City bureau after bureau. Every division. Every office serving every Portlander.

Imagine the misery saved. Imagine the nasty old Oregon history not repeated if we

repeat this recipe.

The City of Portland's Transportation Bureau puts on a summer family event called Sunday Parkways. City planners saw what good it does in Bogata, Columbia, so they hijacked it to here. Three times during Oregon's heavenly summer, once in north Portland, once in northeast Portland, and once in Portland's southeast, about eight miles of streets connecting parks and schools and more parks are closed, for walkers and bicyclers. Families are encouraged to get out, meet neighbors, experience their corner of town without cars in between. Healthy living booths and food tents fill our leafy parks.

Integrating newcomers

Of course walking and talking together on a Sunday morning also benefits anxious and exhausted newcomer families, but that's not the hook of this essay. Bigger than that was those Transportation Bureau folks recognizing a cool opportunity for immigrant community integration into the life our city. Brilliant was asking for newcomer teens, asking them to suit up, to control traffic. To be mini-cops.

Bettering all that was our newest newcomer (Burma) community activists using this community engagement opportunity as a portal for positive parent-police relationships. Call it: community building.

Brilliant too was the Portland Police



Bureau getting how big this all is, and inviting those beat up and bashful fresh-off-da-boat fathers and mothers into their local precinct station, presenting cops as allies in parenting, as supporters of family security. Exactly the opposite from back home, back in those families' bad old Burma.

"Please lend us your teenagers (for Sunday Parkways)," East Precinct commander Michael Crebs asked those hushed parents. "And I'll return them to you better citizens." And he did.

"Please give Mr. Commander your sons and daughters for a day," Moses Rain interpreted for that big blue cop. "And we will bring them back safe and smart." And he did.

And they did. They did all that.

Aman Kubrom, son of Eritrean refugees now interning for Portland's Transportation Bureau, trained and t-shirted those teenagers; he assigned them to traffic control corners; he gave them a role requiring them to be more, much more, than passive refugees. Aman took them

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out of the small world of their apartment complexes to police vigorous corners of prettier Portland. Places they'd never go. Not without him, not without those Transportation Bureau planners, not without that precinct commander, not without those community leaders.

And there you have it. How we make a bigger us. Cheap and obvious, but simply transformative: 1) Take something government is already doing; 2) Imagine how that would benefit families not already inside that lucky world; and 3) Ask community elders and activists to connect your dots and hold their hands.

A better Portland. Brilliant.

Notas: A thousand thanks to project manager Janis McDonald, Portland Bureau of Transportation, for opening this avenue; to East Precinct police commander Michael Crebs for opening all those hearts; to Cha Yo Thai Restaurant owner Victor Mektrakul for feeding all our hungry teens; and of course to Portland's Burma newcomer community mechanics Moses Rain and Kathy Wai for their commitment to their families and to our city. Terima kasih banyak.

I refer to these particular newcomers as Burma community because Burmese or Burman are one of several ethnic nations inside the country of Burma, also called Myanmar, among them: Mon, Chin, Shan, Karen, Bamar, Rakhine, Burman, Kachin, Kayah, and Kayin. Communities or families wanting to participate in Sunday Parkways, please contact Polo at <polo@asianreporter.com> or call (503) 233-5392.

Save money using energy-efficiency tax credits

By Jason Alderman

A few bright spots exist in the current economic situation. One of them is the government's reinstatement of federal tax credits for a variety of energy-efficient home improvements. The deadlines for solar energy systems and fuel-cell tax credits have been extended until 2016, and new credits for small wind energy systems and plug-in hybrid vehicles have been established.

Multnomah Co. offers air-conditioned spaces, hot weather tips for seniors

Continued from page one

The Aging and Disability Services Division offers the following tips for hot summer days:

- Keep air circulating with fans and take cool sponge baths.
- Go to an air-conditioned building if possible. Older adults can visit local senior centers, libraries, or malls.
- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight clothing. If going out, wear a hat.
- Drink lots of water and don't wait to get thirsty.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Limit physical activity and direct exposure to the sun.
- Check with healthcare providers about how hot weather can affect prescription drugs.
- Contact a healthcare provider if experiencing prolonged heat-related symptoms.

To learn more, call the Multnomah County Aging and Disability Services Helpline at (503) 988-3646.

This means taxpayers can not only take advantage of many products that are good for the environment, but can also save on energy expenses while lowering tax bills.

Following are a few highlights:

Home improvements

Tax credits are available for insulation, energy-efficient replacement windows, non-solar water heaters, and certain high-efficiency heating and cooling equipment. The tax credits are not available for new home construction, however, new housing credits are available for photovoltaic systems that convert sunlight into electricity, as well as solar water heaters, small wind energy systems, and fuel cells.

Energy-efficient cars

A new tax credit is available for plug-in hybrid cars and trucks, ranging from \$2,500 to \$7,500, depending on battery capacity. Credits are still available for certain models of hybrid gasoline-electric, diesel, battery-electric, alternative fuel, and fuel-cell vehicles, depending on whether manufacturers have sold the eligible number of vehicles. To learn more, visit <www.fueleconomy.gov>. The Energy Star website, <www.energystar.gov>, run by the U.S. Department of Energy, contains a comprehensive table showing which products qualify for the tax credits and where to find more information.

Other options

For those who are unable to afford a hybrid car or a new energy system, there are still plenty of ways to significantly lower energy bills. For example:

- For every degree the thermostat is raised in the summer (or lowered in the winter), utility bills can be trimmed by three to five percent. More savings can be obtained by adjusting it further at bedtime or by opening windows in the evening.



■ Up to 30 percent of heated or cooled air can be lost through leaks, so add weather stripping around windows and doors and caulking around ducts, plumbing bypasses, and other openings.

■ Heating water is the third-largest home-energy expense, so try lowering water heater temperature to 120° Fahrenheit or lower (provided the dishwasher or appliance's manual says it's okay).

■ Buy a programmable thermostat that turns cooling and heating systems off when nobody's home.

■ Buy Energy Star products, which consume up to 50 percent less energy and water than standard models, and visit the agency's website for information or to locate local retailers, rebates, and more.

■ Use compact fluorescent lamps, which consume 75 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs, last 10 times longer, and save \$30 or more over the lifetime of each bulb.

■ Clean or replace furnace filters each



month and dust refrigerator coils every few months to ensure more efficient operation. Also, clean the clothes dryer lint trap after each use.

■ Install tempered glass doors and a heat-air exchange system to fireplaces to re-circulate warmed air during the winter. Always close dampers when fireplaces are not in use.

■ Run full washer and dryer loads and use cold or warm water whenever possible.

■ Run full dishwasher loads and use the unheated drying cycle if available.

■ Turn off lights, computers, televisions, and other electronic equipment when not in use.

Scaling back energy costs is a no-brainer in these penny-pinching times — not to mention good for the environment.

Jason Alderman directs Visa's financial education programs.