

Photographers help families capture ‘piece of history’

An annual event turns Rowe Middle School’s gymnasium into a portrait studio for a day

BY ANTHONY ROBERTS ✉

The Clackamas Review, Nov 7, 2007

Each day in Clackamas County, thousands of families struggle to make ends meet. They worry about feeding their families or finding childcare while they go to work.

They don’t have time to worry about non-essential expenses like family portraits.



Photographer Brian Geraths.

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That’s “not fair,” according to Portland photographer Brian Geraths, because “a piece of history disappears” when families don’t document moments in time.

That’s why Geraths partnered with the nonprofit Metropolitan Family Service to bring professional photography services to 100 low-income families in North Clackamas County. He joined other photographers at Rowe Middle School in Milwaukie Sunday afternoon, turning the school’s gymnasium into a photo studio for a few hours.

Portrait backgrounds lined the walls of the gym, and each family got a photographer’s individual attention.

Geraths, who owns Prints Charming Photography in Southwest Portland, said he was inspired to start the event six years ago, after 9-11. He felt compelled to help families in his own community, and was moved by the idea of preserving memories.

“I didn’t have a lot of money to send to New York,” he said, “so we all kind of found our ways to help in our communities.”

Over the years, touching stories have sprung out of the event. Some families had immigrated to Oregon from other countries, and sending a portrait back was the first time that grandparents were able to see their grandchildren. A terminally ill father brought his family in one year. They were able to capture their image together before he died two months later.

“Had we not had that service available, we probably would not have that piece of history,” Geraths said.

The family portraits event served as the kickoff of a month-long promotion of National Family Week celebrations in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties. There will be other events at local schools, where Metropolitan Family Service runs two after-school programs, Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) and Children and Family Enrichment (CAFE). The organization will also distribute Thanksgiving food baskets to low-income families.

For more information about the event, visit www.nationalfamilyweek.org. For more information on local events or to contact Metropolitan Family Service, visit www.metfamily.org.