



The Oregonian

Eastside family portraits

As the shutter clicks, Portland changes: Minority, immigrant and poor residents are moving further east, to the other side of I-205

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Sixty families came in their Sunday best, in pressed suits and satin dresses preserved from weddings, in ethnic garb, or in their favorite jeans.

In Vietnamese, in Russian, in Spanish, in English, the parents directed their children, "Look at the camera." Some counted to three and said, "Cheeeeeese."

Together, they create a snapshot of what some call the Other Portland, increasingly teeming with ethnic and racial diversity often lacking in the gelato shops, galleries and condos of the city's close-in neighborhoods. These are outer-eastsiders drawn by the magnet of affordability to a part of the city more inclusive than exclusive.

Metropolitan Family Service invited the families to a free portrait event last week at Davis Elementary School in outer Northeast, drawing from 12 of the east Portland and Gresham schools where this social service agency provides after-school classes, mentoring, tutoring and more. Nearly half of the students at these schools combined are minority, one-fourth speak English as a second language, and two-thirds qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

East Portland, Gresham and Clackamas County is where agencies such as MFS see an increasing need for their services in the schools -- from health and parenting education to getting families more involved in their children's education. In 1990, the highest concentrations of children in poverty were in inner North and Northeast and in Southeast Portland, flanking the west side of Interstate 205. By 2000, driven in part by the rising cost of urban living, most of those heavy concentrations of poverty shifted east of I-205 and beyond, census data compiled by the Portland Multnomah Progress Board shows.

"Very dramatic demographic changes are happening," says Krista Larson, executive director of MFS. "There is a lot of demand in the farther-out areas. Some of the schools we're in are changing in one year, with 20 percent more of the kids eligible for free or reduced-price lunches."

For five years, the agency has offered the free portraits leading up to National Family Week, Nov. 20 to 26. Led by Brian Geraths of Prints Charming Studio, photographers Stephanie Stone, Chris Ryan of Ryan Photo Studio, and Rick Pratt of Shadow Masters & Sound Photography donated their time and talent for the family portrait event. They were supported by sponsors Pro Photo Supply and Rice Studio Supply.

Bich Pham, who came to the event with her mother, her four daughters and her son, said the photos will allow her children to remember how they looked when they were little. The families will receive one 8-by-10 photo, two 5-by-7 photos and a compact disc with a variety of shots from the photo session. Pham plans to hang the pictures in their home.

"I want everyone to look at the pictures," she says, "and say that my kids are beautiful."