

## Profiles of East Portland residents and workers

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PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — East Portland doesn't fit the mythical image of Portlandia. It's a neighborhood of large car lots, fast-food joints and businesses that cater to working-class residents, immigrants and minorities, not hipsters.

These are the stories of some of those who live and work in the area:

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### IMMIGRANT LEADER



Jamal Dar, who arrived in the U.S. two decades ago from Kenya, found success in Oregon. The Somali man studied management at Portland State University, and for the past 18 years has worked as a production supervisor at Nike.

But Dar worried about new Somali refugees streaming into the state, many of whom were being placed by resettlement agencies in East Portland's cheap apartment complexes. The refugees, like Dar, were victims of Somalia's civil war, and many had spent decades in refugee camps. In Portland, families faced culture shock, language woes and social isolation. Somali youth, some of whom had never attended school, dropped out at high rates.

So in 2009, Dar started the African Youth and Community Organization. Originally, the group was based in schools, focused on tutoring and sports. Last year, Dar moved the organization to East Portland and expanded its focus to help families. Community elders pay the office rent and volunteer.

"The idea is, we can help ourselves and become independent," Dar said.

The group offers youth mentorship, academic support, leadership training and assistance with housing and employment. It works to keep youth out of the juvenile justice system and acts as a bridge with child welfare workers.

"When they arrive to Portland, they don't know how to use the stove, refrigerator, or toilet," Dar, 37, said. "But if they survived in a refugee camp, they can survive here."

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URBAN FARMER



Richard Dickinson has lived in East Portland since the 1990's and saw firsthand the impact of unfettered growth and the city's neglect. "It dissipated the whole social fabric of the area," Dickinson said. Because the neighborhoods' old rural character still remains — larger lots, towering Douglas Firs — Dickinson set out to re-build community through agriculture. He began farming on empty properties near his home, with the owners' permission, and selling or giving away the bounty at a makeshift farm stand on his street.

He also started the Outer Southeast Farmer Training Project with local nonprofit Zenger Farm. The project teaches East Portlanders how to grow their own food. Residents can sell their extra harvest at a "community table" at the Lents International Farmers Market.

In East Portland, where fast food abounds and many family incomes are low, farming fills a real need, Dickinson said: It gives residents easy, inexpensive access to fruits and vegetables.

Dickinson, 52, was born in India and lived overseas before settling in Oregon, so he appreciates immigrants and the diverse foods, languages and customs they bring. He says neighborhood associations need to create places where everyone feels welcome.

"We need more connections between cultures and religions," he said.

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## POLICE OFFICER



Portland Police officer Jordan Zaitz, who grew up on an Oregon City farm and has spent most of her 11 years on the force in East Portland, says she loves her job — but would not want to live there.

The area has pockets of good people and nice neighborhoods, Zaitz said, but problems abound. "There are a lot of tweakers, a lot of transients, car break-ins, domestic violence, gangsters, prostitution. It's a lot of sadness," she said.

Zaitz works the 3 p.m. to 1 a.m. shift, the most intense in the busiest of Portland's police precincts. East Precinct gets the largest number of calls for services per year in comparison to the other two Portland precincts. East Precinct also sees a higher number of 'hot' calls — those for violent or serious crimes such as burglaries and robberies. Though the precinct's population is somewhat larger than the other two, it's condensed in a smaller geographic area.

Over the years, Zaitz said, mental health issues have been on the rise, as well as homelessness and heroin abuse. On most nights, Zaitz responds to two to three calls that are mental health related.

On a recent Monday, Zaitz drove to the home of suicidal man, checked on a runaway teen with a warrant, calmed an 8-year-old who attacked his mother, and searched for a man who confronted another with a knife.

She also waved at passers-by and reminded kids on bikes to wear helmets. She wishes the police had more time to talk to residents, instead of just responding to calls.

"If I can make a little dent and do some good, if I can help even one person," Zaitz said, "then my job is done for the day."

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## COMMUNITY ORGANIZER



Jenny Glass is trying to create change in East Portland's biggest crime hotspot. The nonprofit she founded with local leaders, the Rosewood Initiative, is a community center that brings neighbors together.

Many live in isolation, Glass said. The area's affordable housing attracts disabled individuals, single mothers, large low-income families, immigrants and people with criminal pasts.

"We have a lot of folks in very vulnerable situations," she said. "Crime is the symptom we're seeing in our community. But what are the underlying causes?"

Those causes, said Glass, include poverty, a lack of jobs and educational opportunities, and limited access to transportation.

Glass, 31, was hired by AmeriCorps in 2011 as a community organizer. She got neighbors and businesses, police and apartment managers, school administrators and priests talking. She invited residents to events, and built up a network of volunteers.

Two years later, the city named the Rosewood Initiative one of six miniature urban renewal districts. That year, the organization converted a former billiards lounge into a community hub.

The community center has bilingual staff and attracts a mix of Latinos, African-Americans and whites. It offers computers, dance classes, and a space for residents and groups to hang out and hold events. There's a business incubator and organizations that help people find a job or fix a bike.

East Portland is not all about crime, Glass said.

"There are plenty of residents here who are amazing and have great potential," she said.

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## BUSINESS OWNER

For Prabin Pandey, a refugee from Bhutan in Southeast Asia, East Portland is a land of opportunity. His grocery store is one of dozens of ethnic stores and restaurants in the area, but his journey to business owner was arduous.

After living in a refugee camp in Nepal, Pandey's family came to Seattle in 2009. Pandey, who was 17, attended high school and community college, taking English classes at night.

His dream was to study mechanical engineering, but both of Pandey's parents are disabled, so he needed to work. While enrolled at Washington State University, Pandey became a traveling salesman in Seattle and Portland, selling cultural items he imported from Nepal — clothes, food, spices — out of a suitcase, door-to-door at other refugees' homes.

Saving every penny, Pandey eventually had enough to open International Food Bazaar, a Nepali grocery store in East Portland. He's only 23 years old, but he's also opened two stores in other states and a gas station in East Portland. The income supports his parents and younger sister.

Pandey says he's become a role model for others who want to start a business, but he wishes Portland would offer more support to newcomers interested in entrepreneurship.

"They all want to do business like me," Pandey said. "I tell them it's possible if you're focused and put a lot of time into it."

*AP Photos by Gosia Wozniacka and Don Ryan.*