

The Oregonian

\$50,000 pledge may bring back concerts at Washington Park

Recreation | The Portland Parks Bureau needs a \$50,000 match before it can restore the free summer program

By **LYNNE TERRY**
THE OREGONIAN

Like the flick of a conductor's baton, the free summer concerts in Washington Park were suspended, then thrown a partial lifeline within a week.

The Portland Bureau of Parks & Recreation just needs \$50,000 to match a pledge by a Portland developer and his wife who volunteered to help give the popular series a reprieve.

"This is an important part of the community and eliminating it in this era of bad news is just one more downer for the city," said Gordon Sondland, who pledged the money with his wife through their enterprises.

"There are a lot of kids and families who can't afford to go to concerts and do things at the Rose Garden and elsewhere. I think it's important to keep it going."

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who pledged the money with his wife through their enterprises

Needless to say, the city is thrilled. "It's a very generous offer," said Beth Sorensen, spokeswoman for Parks & Rec. "We hope that other businesses will step forward and contribute the other 50 percent that the production costs."

Over the past four years, the city has produced as many as 18 free concerts in

Washington Park every August, thanks to the sponsorship of Daimler Trucks North America LLC.

The company, which has sliced staff and plans to shut its manufacturing on Swan Island in 2010, dropped out this year, leading the city to announce Monday it was suspending the tradition.

The concerts, which date to 1949, have showcased a wide range of genres, from bluesman Curtis Salgado to the Portland Festival Symphony.

But it was not the music as much as the family-friendly atmosphere that prompted Sondland and his wife, Katy Durant, to donate through their Sondland Durant Foundation, Hotel deLuxe and Hotel Lucia.

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Sondland and his wife, who have two young children, have long supported activities for children. In February last year, they gave the Portland Art Museum \$1 million through their foundation to offer free admission to anyone 17 and younger.

Sondland said the gift to Parks & Rec is meant as a one-time bridge to keep the concerts alive.

The city set a May 15 deadline to raise the other \$50,000 — giving itself a tight deadline in tough economic times. But officials are hopeful they will succeed.

"I think there is an energy and excitement that's coming out of this challenge grant that will inspire other people to step forward," Sorensen said.

If the city gets the money, organizers will have to scramble to book the talent. They also are producing 30 free concerts in neighborhood parks.

Other free activities are on the horizon as well.

Portland Actors Ensemble will perform "King Lear" and "Henry IV, Part 1" in various parks over six weeks starting June 11, and a new group, Original Practice Shakespeare Festival, will stage "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in eight metro-area parks from June 13.

The Oregon Symphony will perform one free concert — in Tom McCall Waterfront Park the Thursday before Labor Day — but the city will show free Movies in the Park starting in July.

If money for the Washington Park series comes through, residents will have a pick of free entertainment.

"We're trying to create as many opportunities for young people to access our facilities for free," said city Commissioner Nick Fish, who oversees the Parks Bureau. "If we're successful, this will be a real shot in the arm."