

Free Washington Park music festival could be saved

Fundraising challenge issued by husband and wife team

BY JIM REDDEN

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Local businessman Gordon Sondland and foundation director Katy Durant have issued a challenge to help him save the 2009 Washington Park Summer Festival.

Sondland, the CEO of Hotel deLuxe and Hotel Lucia and co-principal of the Sondland Durant Foundation, has pledged to contribute \$50,000, toward the cost of producing the festival this year. His wife, Durant, is the other co-principal of the foundation.

The challenge requires a 50 percent match to be raised by May 15 for the festival to continue. The total cost of producing the annual free, two-week concert series in Washington Park is around \$100,000.

"During this economic downturn that has affected so many in our city, we think it is dire to continue this vital community event that is attended by so many families with children in one of our most historic and beautiful locations," said Sondland. "Portlanders deserve good news and we are thrilled that we can assist with this fun free event that supports our city's tradition of music, culture, and unity."

If the challenge match is successful, Portland Parks & Recreation will be able to present the Festival during the first two weeks of August, continuing a 60-year tradition. The parks bureau announced just days ago that it was forced to cancel this year's festival after losing its major sponsor, Daimler Trucks North America, because of corporate reductions.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for us to save this much-loved Portland tradition," said Portland's Parks Commissioner Nick Fish. "I am very grateful to these organizations for their generosity and civic leadership in making this challenge possible. They are setting the standard for other businesses and civic leaders to make their own contributions to help us preserve the festival."

The Washington Park Summer Festival was established in 1949 by Dorothea Lensch, the first recreation director for Portland Parks & Recreation. It ran in various forms until 1988, when budget restrictions required it to be put on hold. The festival resumed in 2005, when Daimler (formerly Freightliner LLC) partnered with the parks bureau as the presenting sponsor of the series.