



## The Oregonian

### **Making a difference**

**Two projects for at-risk kids produce results and change lives in North and Northeast Portland**

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The odds are enough to depress a Pollyanna, and the history of efforts to beat those odds aren't uplifting. So when something works to improve the lives of at-risk kids in Portland's lower-income neighborhoods, it's worth noting.

And celebrating.

Last month first lady Laura Bush was in town to do both at a gathering for Friends of the Children in Northeast Portland. The Friends program hires full-time mentors to help disadvantaged children over the course of their young lives. Each mentor helps eight children negotiate their considerable challenges, providing advice, support and, yes, love. It's a Portland program that's now gone nationwide, and it's easy to see why. Ten of 13 children in the program's first class graduated from high school last year. That's impressive in and of itself, but consider this: Six of the 10 were the first in their families ever to graduate from high school. And four of the 13 children went on to college. No wonder Laura Bush was here as part of the White House's Helping America's Youth Initiative.

She might consider returning to Portland for De La Salle North Catholic High School's graduation. The school requires that students work in real jobs one day a week, and the approach appears to be working well. Fifty-three of the 55 students in the North Portland school's first graduating class will be going to college next fall.

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