

NEWSBRIEFS

Sit-lie extended through October

The Sidewalk Obstructions Ordinance, or "sit-lie," will remain in effect until at least October 23, city council decided on May 6. None of the commissioners budged from their positions at the hearing the week before, and the extension passed 4-1.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz had proposed prolonging the term of the ordinance, which was scheduled to sunset in June, so that she and Commissioner Nick Fish could spearhead a community-wide discussion before deciding what to do with the law in the long term. At the hearing, council heard testimony from one person in favor of extending the ordinance and more than 20 people opposed to it.

Commissioner Randy Leonard registered the only "no" vote.

"Sometimes our community gets caught up in process for process' sake, as if process is a means in itself," Leonard said. "This process that's being asked for by my colleagues is at the expense of some of the most vulnerable in our community, and I am just appalled."

He added that he hopes Fritz and Fish will arrive at the same conclusion he has: that the sit-lie ordinance does not work.

Fritz said she does not yet know how she'll vote on renewing the ordinance in the fall, but she identified issues from the public's testimony that she wants to address over the summer.

"I know that a lot of passion has been provoked by this effort (to extend the ordinance)," Fish said. "I'm confident that with the breathing room that has been proposed and the chance to have a broader community conversation, we can come back in 4-5 months (to vote it up or down), and ... have a better understanding of the various ways it could be strengthened if it was to go forward."

City Council will vote on a long-term renewal of the ordinance in September.

Motor Vehicle Tax passes

In an attempt to backfill its budget pit, Multnomah County on May 7 passed an increase to the motor vehicle rental tax. The county estimates that the tax, which will increase from 12.5 percent to 17 percent, will raise an extra \$4.7 million for the county's general fund and help preserve some human services threatened with cuts.

Over 60 people came to the Multnomah County Commission meeting to support the increase, which was introduced by Commissioner Jeff Cogen. The county council passed it unanimously.

Before the increase, tourists paid fewer taxes in Portland than in almost every other major city nationwide — mostly because Oregon does not have sales tax. With the rental tax increase, Cogen's office says, Portland will still charge visitors less than most cities.

The rental car tax is one of few that the county actually has control over: Income and property taxes are dictated by the state. The revenue predicted is small in comparison to the county's \$45 million shortfall, but the county says anything helps.

"We're hamstrung in a million different ways, but this is one way we can bring some money forward," Cogen staffer Karol Collymore said at a budget forum in April. "Here at the county, we're just trying to keep our pants on, frankly."

Working to help others while helping himselfBY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Life got you down? Overwhelmed and don't know where to turn? Try heading downtown to the Safeway on Southwest 10th and Jefferson and look for Tom Tiller. Pray he's still there and hasn't gone on a road trip somewhere, because, according to a woman named Mary, Tom will "shore you up with his heart and soul." Mary catches the bus at a stop near Safeway and has taken to talking to the Street Roots vendor nearly every day for

the past couple weeks. She does it because "it makes her feel connected to someone."

Mary is not the only one to benefit from Tom's attention.

During the hour I spent with Tom I saw him help several people with his encouraging words. A Vietnam vet, for example, drove by on an electric wheelchair for his daily dose of support. Jerry, who has cancer and is on oxygen, began coming to see Tom shortly after the vendor started selling Street Roots a couple months ago. I watched as Tom squatted to face Jerry and listen to him.

A 32-year-old woman, who looks more like 18, watched Tom for a while and then approached, asking how she could become a vendor. A McDonald's employee hung out with the vendor during his lunch hour and left smiling after handing Tom and the 32-year-old woman each a burger.

It is obvious that part of what people like about Tom is his loving attention. "I just give them a little different perspective," he told me, "about what's hurting inside them. They need to love themselves and know that they are okay."

Tom has been sleeping on the front porch of a commercial building for seven weeks. He buys prepared food from Safeway, because they allow him to earn his living selling papers by their front door. He

says he has all the clothing he needs and carries it around in a bright orange backpack. When the weather is truly awful he goes to the downtown library, rides the rail, or goes inside Safeway until the rain slows down.

"My calling," he informed me, "is to help young people on the streets." A recovering addict, Tom claims he has convinced five young people to kick heroin habits, and he's working on a sixth.

I asked him to what he attributes his success. "The kids check me out (for) a week or so, then come up to me," he said. "(I) can talk to them because I've been there ... All I'm doing is being honest."

Tom claims the youths tell him he is "their dad on the streets." There is no doubt in my mind that it's true, because he listens to everyone with the kind of attention for which most humans hunger. As he says, "I am a good spirited person." It comes across to those who take the time to talk to him.

He also calls himself very honest. "I tell (the kids) that there is more to life than sticking that needle in your arm."

Tom seems to require very little out of life for himself, but he spends a great deal of time helping others. For example, he writes a note on each new issue of Street Roots that he buys. On one recent issue, he wrote: "If one helps one, they all help each other." Another time he wrote, "I'd rather be the lowest tramp in Heaven than the highest angel in Hell. Thank you, Tom."

Tom wants to thank Safeway, its employees, and all its patrons, because everyone has been friendly, supportive, and receptive to him.



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ

VENDOR PROFILE
*Tom Tiller***COMMENTARY****A harsh reality on Portland's streets**

BY JULIE MCCURDY

The Urban Gypsy

Julie McCurdy resides in Portland and is experiencing homelessness with her Italian greyhound, Maggie. She is a regular contributor to Street Roots.

So it's happened again, like the familiar refrain of a favorite song. I have loved, lost and left yet another overly violent man.

Ironically, in the end, there wasn't anyone in my tent able to protect me from the one I chose to protect me from everyone else. I didn't know until last night that I never needed the protection of a man in the first place.

In the past, when I better fit the description of an acceptable part of the mainstream, I would have possibly turned to law enforcement or the many agencies who work on these issues. This time, I lacked the energy to do anything. As a gypsy, I have no voice with law enforcement, and quite frankly, they have never been able to protect me from a man's wrath in the past.

So last night, a woman who is adored in this community looked me in the eye. She

said, "Sweet sister girl, you will be safe. Don't you worry. We protect our own."

I smiled and said, somewhat skeptically, "Thank you."

My smile turned upward in amazement as she then stomped up and down the street taking all kinds of people to task, explaining what happened and demanding that everyone surround me and keep me safe.

And they did. While I lay inside my tent letting my senses celebrate the lack of his touch, and the silence and the lack of fear and anger became lullabies, they camped around me, literally growling at passersby. It seems I may have found those Mastiffs on steroids after all, because one woman stood for another instead of against her.

Thank you, Duchess. Would that we were all as kind as yourself.

VENDOR WORK ADS

Bruce Heino: Available for yard work, general assistance, four-hour minimum, wage negotiable. Please call the Street Roots office or contact New Seasons at 33rd and Killingsworth.

Bill Atkinson: Yard work, moving, misc. Four-hour minimum, \$10 an hour. Call Street Roots office at 503-228-5657.

Vicki Sittinghawk: House cleaning, very thorough.

References. Call 503-287-4174.
Dan & Donna: Need odd jobs? Can do painting, yardwork, miscellaneous labor. Very dependable. Call the Street Roots office at 503-228-5657, 503 267-4794.

Handy man needs work: moving, painting, yard work, clean-up. If I can sweat and you can be doing something else, please call me at 503-803-2533.

We the People**When it comes to your civil liberties, you should hear what you're missing!**

With Alejandro Queral, Joanne Zuhl
Linda Olson-Osterlund and Patrik Angstrom

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