

## County looks to legislature to salvage budget

BY MARA GRUNBAUM  
STAFF WRITER

When Multnomah County Commissioner Jeff Cogen realized what shape his county's budget might take this year, he panicked.

"When we first became aware of the magnitude of the cuts that we were facing, I was honestly terrified," he said at the June 4 county commission hearing.

The mood was lighter on that day, as the County Board of Commissioners finalized a 2009-10 budget that makes significant cuts, but salvages many of the human services the county feared they'd have to drop.

Facing an enormous two-year deficit, the county had to cut over \$22 million from its budget for the next fiscal year. They would have had to slice off another \$12.5 million if county employees hadn't agreed to forgo their annual wage increases earlier this year, a move the commissioners say saved many vital programs.

"My only disappointment is that I think we should have done more," said County Chair Ted Wheeler. He wished they could open a planned mental health crisis center this year, for example. "I'm sorry that we did not have the funding."

The county's 2009-10 budget includes:

- \$5.7 million for mental health crisis services

- \$5.9 million for adult addictions treatment

- \$15.9 million for energy assistance

- \$400,000 for the Homeless Benefits Recovery Program, a new one-year pilot project to help 120 individuals who are chronically connect with federal benefits.

But the county's general fund only accounts for \$45 million of County Human Services' \$185 million annual budget. The rest comes down from the state level, and Gov. Ted Kulongoski's recommended budget had threatened to shut off the flow. Kulongoski proposed a 50 percent cut to acute inpatient psychiatric care, an 83 percent cut to alcohol and drug treatment, and a 90 percent cut to outpatient mental health care for adults without Medicaid coverage.

Final budget decisions rest with the state Legislature. When the Joint Ways and Means Committee presented their recommended budget in May, they reverted most of the governor's drastic cuts. The restoration of those services depends on the passage of a revenue package that will raise the alternative minimum tax for businesses and income tax for people who make over \$125,000 a year.

Other programs have not been salvaged. The Employment Related Day Care program, which helps low-income parents pay for child care so they can join the workforce, faces a \$47 million cut — dropping 3,600 families from the program, even with the new revenue package.

A looming question now is how the state and county can spare themselves from more deep cuts the next time around. For almost a decade, the county has faced reductions even in positive budget years, and much of the money Wheeler found to save programs this year comes as one-time funding that may not be available again.

At the hearing, County Commissioner Judy Shiprack called the one-time funding unsustainable. She said she worried that it might "set the stage for another budget process nightmare" next year.

How to prevent the nightmare? For Joanne Fuller, director of Multnomah County's human services department the answer is tax reform.

"The solution really is to reform the tax system," she said. "It's to repeal the kicker and to create a tax system that doesn't go through these big swings."

## A vendor well-suited for success

BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The first thing I noticed about George, when I arrived a little late for our meeting at the Street Roots office, was how nicely he was dressed. He was sporting a blue dress shirt, a tie, and nice dress slacks. A suit jacket was draped over his chair. "Dress well, feel well," he said; "dress bad, feel bad." He added that when he dresses nicely, people see that he is "chasing after health, not drugs." He likes good clothing and dreams of becoming a clothing designer.

The second thing I noticed about this Street Roots vendor was his easy smile and love of words. He began with stories of lessons his grandmother taught him as a little boy while she taught him to fish. The stories seemed ripe with moral instructions about hope, self-sufficiency, and independence. "Stay positive," he said, smiling. "Keep believing in what you do."

George told me a number of things he does to help him keep a positive attitude even during the toughest times. He said he reads the book of Galatians every morning and encourages others to pursue education so "they can reach their goals." Sometimes

### VENDOR PROFILE George Mayes

late at night, when his only mattress is a large slab of concrete, he talks into his tape recorder. He shared part of one of his recordings. His voice on the recorder described being outside with nowhere to go at two in the morning. The monologue is interrupted by his congested voice saying "stay positive" midway through his description of the night.

I asked to see what George carries in his small, black backpack. He has two manila envelopes with some artwork in pencil and a plastic folder neatly organized to hold Street Roots newspapers and other important information.

"Art, business and communications" are three things that are important to him. He mentions the three frequently when I ask him about either his background or his goals. A pencil drawing of a Christian cross reflects his art and religious interests. Taking the initiative to start selling Street



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ

Roots over three months ago, even though the gout in both his ankles made it difficult for him to walk, reflects his devotion to business and self-reliance. No one who has ever talked with him doubts his devotion to the spoken word and desire to communicate.

Selling Street Roots "gives me a chance to dialogue with lots of people and see people I haven't seen for years." He clearly relishes the contact and interactions. George sees lots of people on the streets doing nothing, he says. He uses selling Street Roots to model self-sufficiency and "encourage them to do something with themselves." His main goal in life is right now, he says, is to "reach everybody to believe in education so they can reach their goals."

George had a difficult winter this year. The gout flared up in both ankles when the weather turned cooler in October, and he was sleeping outside. Prior to his illness, he says he worked remodeling houses. "The gout beat me down." A number of good friends helped him through this time. "I want to thank everybody that was there helping me through it."

A physician gave him several prescriptions for his gout that "did no good." Once he started selling newspapers, he began asking customers what to do. They got him eating garlic, drinking mineral water, eating salads, and eating other things in moderation. The dietary changes are helping. "I'm coming back!" he says. The pain is gone. "I can walk long distances now."

George has difficulty knowing how to express his gratitude to Portlanders for the way they help him. He often tells people "Street Roots is gonna make me millions and then I'll give you billions." He's not talking about money. He means millions and billions of stories.

George carries an old business card in his wallet. There is a poem on the back that he says he authored. This is an excerpt:

*Life is queer with its twists and turns,  
As every one of us sometimes learns,  
And many a person turns about  
When they might have won  
had they stuck it out."*

George Myran Mayes is sticking it out.

## Finding the spirit of America in a size 10 1/2

BY ZED WAGNER  
STREET ROOTS VENDOR

It's 9:20 a.m., May 5, on a misty Friday morning, and there are about 60 people in white tee shirts running around setting up tables, and chairs in the park blocks at Everett and Eighth streets, as a line of Portland's homeless file up. There is something exciting in the air, like one feels in childhood on Christmas Eve. The feeling that something really good is about to happen. Word on the street has it that someone is giving away a lot of shoes. That's why I am here. I am here to find out who that is.

I am here to meet with Chris Carmichael, to volunteer, and see what the deal really is all about. Chris told me, find a bald guy with one blue and one brown eye and you will find me. Sure enough, I found such an unlikely guy soon after making it to the Park. He was just pulling up in an SUV within a minute of my arrival. He opens the tailgate and pulls out a collapsible pavilion that was embossed with the Adidas brand.

He mentioned that the tent, which would be used as a food staging area, was theirs, and that a lot of people were here from Addidas, Keen and Shoe Mill to take part in this.

The crew is giving away 5,000 brand new pairs of shoes and 3,000 new pairs of socks. This is Barefoot Friday. I ask if I can interview him, and he smiles while nodding.

Barefoot Monday, he says, was in Indianapolis. Barefoot Tuesday was in Atlanta.

Barefoot Wednesday was in Birmingham, and yesterday it happened in L.A. Today, of course, we are here in Portland. Tomorrow will be Barefoot Saturday in L.A. And on Barefoot Sunday, 922 churches across the U.S. will ask their members to come to the altar and take off their Sunday-fine shoes as an offering. These will be collected and given out as well.

Soles4Souls, he says, is a non-profit organization that started in Nashville, and its all about helping people in need get shoes. The group partners with shoe makers like Adidas, and Keen and other

shoe industry players as well as restaurants and food professionals. He changes the subject and asks if I will help hand out donuts. Sure, I reply, and start working alongside other volunteers. About noon, we start handing out pizza that has been donated by 15 local pizza shops.

The line wraps a full circle, around the entire park block. It takes 43 minutes to grab a ticket at the end of the line, and turn it in at the gate. Once inside people grab a seat, and are brought different brands of shoes in their size. After people make a choice, they exit past the food booth, and grab a snack on their way out. The blue tickets were handed out from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

I am reminded again, why humanity needs community, and why bureaucracy cannot handle simple things. Today, a large number of people filled with love, armed with goods generously donated and shared freely with the needy without cost overruns, miles of red tape, and loophole exclusions. I think I saw the spirit of America.

Street Roots celebrates 10 years of making a change in our community