



CELEBRATING
A DECADE OF

Education • Dialogue • Independence

HERE TODAY...

The creator of flash mobs sets his sights on the phenomenon of instant - and fleeting fame

Page 8



The perfect storm

Northwest Oregon's Section 8 disaster is being repeated across the country

BY JOANNE ZUHL
STAFF WRITER

It has been called a perfect storm. A rare convergence of forces that, on their own, could possibly be withstood, but in combination are insurmountable, leaving disaster in their wake.

But this no act of God, or Mother Nature, but rather the high-pressure system of government. The storm, in bureaucratic terms, is the ongoing economic derailment compounded by a restricted federal funding system. The casualties are 285 families in Northwest Oregon who as of July 1 will be terminated from Section 8 assistance, this despite their qualifications and need for the program to secure stable housing. Their provider, the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority, or NOHA, learned in mid-May that it would not be getting the federal Section 8 funding it needed to

This is the second story on the crisis facing families in Northwest Oregon. The first article, "The Letter" published June 12, is available on our blog at www.streetroots.wordpress.com.

continue the Section 8 program at current levels. And within weeks, the families were given a 30-day notice of their termination.

"I don't really know what to say," says NOHA Executive Director Carol Snell. "They can blame us if they have to. It was a situation that we got caught in and don't really know how we got there.

"Certainly, if I knew I was going to be here, I would not have done the things that were done to get us here."

Locally, NOHA has taken the brunt of the blame on the situation, facing accusations of mismanagement in fulfilling its 1,077 Section 8 housing vouchers. It overcompensated for falling below full capacity for most of 2008 by exceeding capacity at the end of the year and throughout 2009. To do so, NOHA dipped into its reserves to cover the costs. But in mid-May, nearly two months beyond normal notification schedules, NOHA — which had signed up more than 100 families over its HUD-proscribed limit — learned that it wasn't going to get the funds to cover the difference.

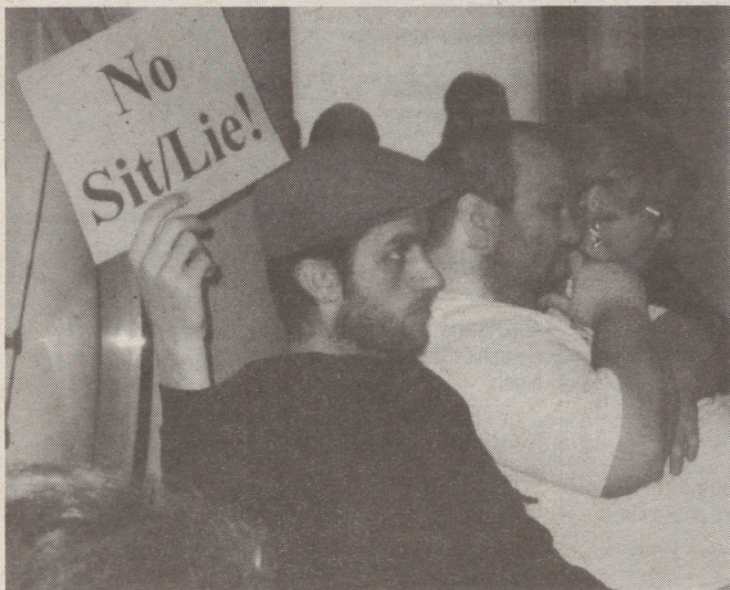
NOHA screwed up — end of story.

Only the story isn't over, nor is it limited to Oregon or even a particular style of management.

"We probably still don't have an idea on how big this problem is."

— TED VAN DYKE
DIRECTOR,
GOVERNMENT
AFFAIRS FOR THE
PUBLIC HOUSING
AUTHORITY
DIRECTORS
ASSOCIATION

See PERFECT STORM, page 11



Tobiah Tillman, a homeless advocate, was among a crowded room of people protesting the Sit-Lie ordinance when it came up for renewal before the City Council this past spring.

PHOTO BY MARA GRUNBAUM

Judge: Sit-lie still unconstitutional

BY JOANNE ZUHL
AND ISRAEL BAYER
STAFF WRITERS

Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Stephen K. Bushong has ruled that the city of Portland's sidewalk-obstruction ordinance — commonly referred to as sit-lie, unconstitutionally exceeds the city's authority.

The ruling was issued June 19, and grants the motion to dismiss a sit-lie case being defended by attorney Clayton Lance.

"This ordinance has been found unconstitutional on three separate and distinct grounds," Lance told Street Roots. "That's a heck of a lot of unconstitutionality for one little ordinance out of the city. It just is not going to work and they just keep trying to make it fit, and it will never be able to fit, in my opinion."

The sit-lie law prohibits sitting or lying on downtown sidewalks between the hours of 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. The city has said that it is to keep the sidewalks free of obstructions. Records show that

the majority of people cited under the law are homeless.

Judge Bushong ruled that the city's law conflicts with and is pre-empted by state law; State v. Robison, which Lance says already allows the city to penalize people for obstructing sidewalks.

"The (sit-lie) ordinance does not at all deal with obstruction. That's a myth," Lance said. "It was to move the transient and the homeless because the transient and homeless were sitting on the sidewalks in downtown Portland. Nothing else."

As Lance noted, this is the latest round in the city's failed attempts to institute a sit-lie law. In 2004, Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Marilyn Litzenger ruled that the city's 2003 version of the ordinance was unconstitutionally vague and overbroad. The current version was a response to that ruling with more specific information on what was and was not prohibited.

See SIT-LIE, page 3