

**NEWSBRIEFS****Street Roots vendor does a check-in on Leonard's goodwill**

From an Aug. 19 exchange between Street Roots vendor Darren Alexander and City Commissioner Randy Leonard:

Mr. Leonard,

I read the article in today's Willamette Week on your proposal to regulate panhandlers. Like you, and many others, the more aggressive panhandlers — particularly more able-bodied ones who hold cardboard signs when they could be working to make a decent living for themselves — can be a thorn in the backside. While I applaud this, I am concerned about the canvassers and other vendors.

I am a vendor for Street Roots, which I'm sure you're familiar with. As the director, Israel Bayer, himself would state, selling Street Roots is a more acceptable alternative to panhandling. The majority of us — 99.99% of us — are courteous, friendly, and do what we can to build community and contribute to the betterment of society.... My concern is this regulation could wrongfully target those who are behaving themselves ietyas they canvass for charities and/or selling SR. What I basically ask for is assurance that you only target those who are overtly aggressive and belligerent.

In closing, I want to thank you for your service to the city, and thank you for listening.

In kindest regards, I remain,

Darren W. Alexander

I agree with you, Darren. I have had nothing but positive experiences with Streets Roots vendors. Thanks for writing....Randy

**Washington State released felons can vote again**

More than 150,000 released felons in the state of Washington got their right to vote back — thanks to a new state law, House Bill 1517, that went into effect the end of July.

The law restores the right of ex-convicts to vote once they have finished their prison time and parole. In the past, offenders had to pay off every penny of their court debt and restitution, with interest. Then, they had to prove the debt was paid, petition a judge to restore the right and then hope the county elections auditor got (or didn't lose) the paperwork authorizing him or her to register.

"That has simply not been fair," said Washington State Sen. Jeannie Kohl-Welles, one of the bill's champions. "It's been the equivalent of a modern-day poll tax."

Ex-offenders still have to pay off their legal financial obligations, she said, but voting is one way to give them a stake in the community and in going straight — something that saves everyone tax dollars in reduced recidivism.

**CORRECTIONS**

Street Roots strives for accuracy, but we're human. So we also strive to correct errors in our paper whenever possible. Please report any errors to our managing editor, Joanne Zuhl, at 503-228-5657, or write to joanne@streetroots.org.

**Coming to peace**

*Portland's a long way from Vietnam, but not so far for Brian Pham*

BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Being homeless in Portland reminds Brian Pham of when he lived in a refugee camp as a small child. I asked him how the two experiences are different, hoping to hear that our street people live better than Vietnamese refugees did in Malaysian camps in the 1970s.

"Its not (any different,)" he told me. "Being homeless, it's the same situation ... there's a lot of loneliness. People look at you differently, make judgments." People don't understand "all the hardships of homelessness."

When Brian was about 4 years old, he and his siblings and two uncles made it onto a fishing boat headed for a refugee camp in Malaysia. His mother was reportedly captured while still on the beach. His biological father had been imprisoned earlier during the Vietnam war. Some

**VENDOR PROFILE**

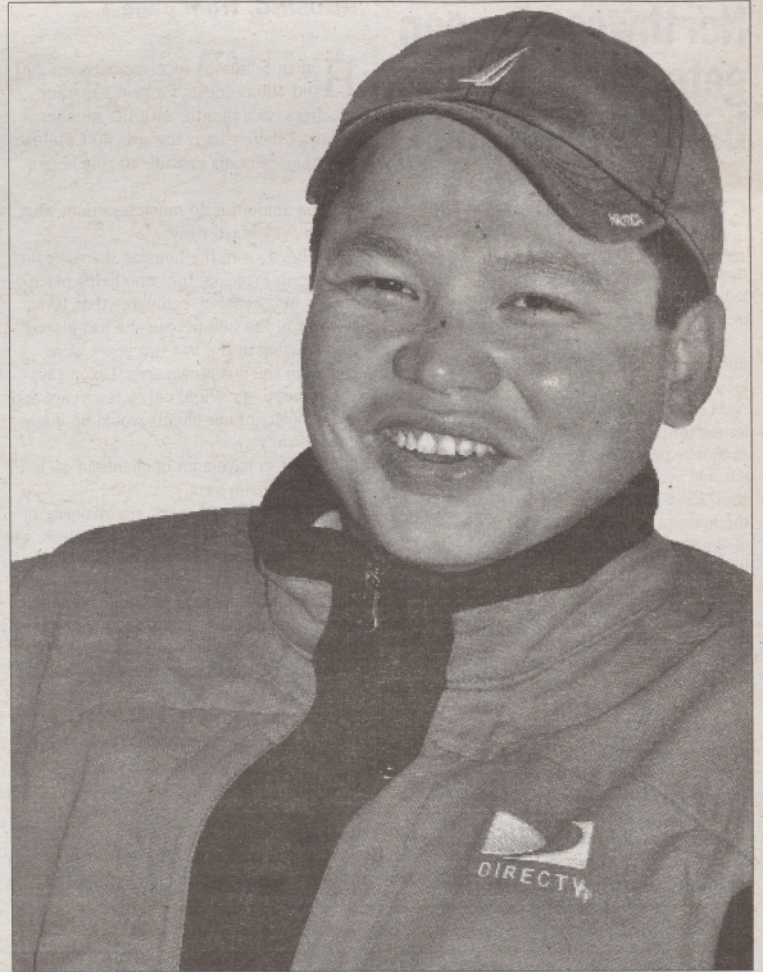
*Brian Pham*

months after arriving at the refugee camp, Catholic Charities brought Pham to the United States and arranged for him to live with a family on a farm in Iowa. He eventually moved to Oregon when his biological parents were allowed to immigrate to Portland.

Now 37 years old, Brian has worked a variety of jobs in western Oregon. He's been employed by grocery stores, publishing companies, and by the owner of several apartment buildings. He was also a supervisor in shipping and receiving at a beverage distribution company for a couple years. Pham began selling Street Roots in January soon after being laid off from his job doing pre-press preparation and bindery work at a firm in Medford.

Brian says he's given up looking for another job. He told me he's gotten tired of being rejected because of the economy, but he'd like to get back into shipping and receiving some day.

You can usually find Brian in front of Starbucks on East Burnside and 28th Avenue from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., or outside the New Seasons grocery store on Interstate from 5 to 10 p.m., where he sells Street Roots in order to buy groceries. The



BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ WWW.PHOTOADVOCACY.COM

income isn't usually big enough to cover his expenses so he relies on donations for the rest of his needs.

This past winter Brian waited in line to get food from Sisters of the Road and Blanchet House when he was hungry. What were once 10-minute waits in line have grown to nearly an hour, he says. Waiting in food lines cuts into the amount of time Brian can spend selling newspapers. His income goes down.

Brian also depends on donations for clothing, but his petite frame makes it difficult to find things that fit. "You go into the place and there are only size 15 shoes," Brian shrugs his shoulders, "and you wear a size 8..."

I became curious about how he would like to dress if money were no object. "If you could have any pair of shoes you wanted," I asked him, "what would they be?"

"Nikes. They're made in Vietnam." He smiled. "Keep my people working, even if I can't get a job."

Pham not only waits for food and clothing donations. He is also waiting for affordable housing. He applied at Central City Concern in January. He's been told it will be at least 60 days more before something will be

available. In the meantime, he camps outside.

Brian blames "the two wars" in the Middle East for decreased resources here at home. He wants people to come up with a "resolution to the problem, bring our people home, and focus our resources on our hunger, clothing, health, and shelter problems."

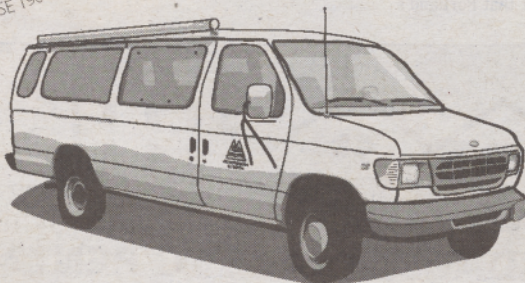
In addition to his current difficulties, Brian struggles with his continued anger about the Vietnam War. His father was imprisoned in Vietnam for 15 years. He was torn away from his mother as a very young child and raised by strangers. His grandfather participated in the war of independence from France. "Millions of civilians were killed."

Given his personal experiences, it is not surprising that Brian doesn't like war.

"I want to come to peace with myself about the war," Pham told me.

Perhaps it will help if he can find a way to procure a pair of Nikes. There might be catharsis in helping a former enemy keep working, even if he can't get a job for himself.

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