

MISSING PERSONS, from page 8

Each year since 1990, on or near the first day of winter, the National Coalition for the Homeless has sponsored National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day to bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness and to remember those who died while homeless.

In 2008, more than 120 cities, including Portland, conducted Memorial Day events on or around Dec. 21 to honor the more than 3,200 people who died homeless that year.

Wilson says that it is still ultimately a judgment call by using that method. "I know that the advocates find the information useful," Wilson says. "Does it tell us new information every year? Does it drive us to change our programming? Not in a substantial way."

To the surprise of Wilson at the time, it resulted in increased funding for homeless services in King County. In 2005, State Rep. Mark Miloschia, who represents southwest King County, co-sponsored a bill that added \$25 million to Washington's Housing Trust Fund in an effort to expand the amount of affordable housing throughout the state.

Dr. Karen Gunson, Oregon's medical examiner, says she has no intent to begin keeping track of the number of homeless people dying each year. She cites the lack of financial resources, a small staff, and the lack of appropriate statistical computer software as why.

"If I had the money, I might do that. I have other pressing needs," Gunson says, mentioning providing forensic pathology services to other counties.

Gunson also says that the majority of people arriving at the Medical Examiner's office are not homeless. She guesses that one or two individuals a month are homeless. The medical examiner's office had more than 60 cases since the beginning of the year, with one person coming from a homeless camp.

Gunson says she has not been approached by anyone at the Housing Bureau or any homeless advocates to start a program similar to King County's. Neither Deibert nor Daniel Ledezma, Fish's housing policy advisor, could comment on whether there would be value to monitoring the number of homeless people dying each year in the Portland area.

Developing ways of counting the number

of homeless that die each year was a discussion topic during the Coalition for a Livable Future's annual summit on regional livability this past May. Two points made during that discussion were using such information to lobby for additional funding for homeless services. A second regarded improving coordination and communication between homeless service providers and health care networks.

The Coordinating Committee to End Homelessness, a stakeholder group in charge of implementing the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, met on Feb. 17 to assess the "state of the 10-Year Plan," at the half way mark. Between discussion of how the 10-Year Plan has worked, hasn't worked, and improvements needing to be made, there remained an elephant in the room: the lack of a dedicated source of revenue for affordable housing development and related services in the Portland area.

Dr. Wayne Cells, Outside In's medical director, thinks a stronger link needs to exist between homeless service agencies and Portland's health care system.

"You can't disconnect them," Wilson says.

Cells says that it is difficult for homeless people to prioritize maintaining their health because they are so focused on finding adequate and safe shelter, and food. It is common, he says, to put health care off until "it reaches crisis level," which in turn results in emergency room visits and higher costs.

Homeless people also have a more difficult time dealing with diseases that present no physical symptoms, such as high blood pressure. "They're never going to know and they're never going to seek care," Cells says.

Cells says it would go a long way toward understanding people's medical conditions and increasing the level of care they receive, even if agencies required a physical exam as a requirement to enter housing or receive

services.

"I don't know if the survey would make any difference if the money wasn't there" to create more services and housing, says Robyn Bock, the nursing supervisor at the

**A year after King County Medical Examiner's began tracking people who died homeless, State Rep. Mark Miloschia, who represents southwest King County, co-sponsored a bill that added \$25 million to Washington's Housing Trust Fund in an effort to expand the amount of affordable housing throughout the state.**

West Side Clinic, a medical clinic for low-income people operated by Multnomah County's Public Health Department.

Nic Granum at Central City Concern agrees with the idea of a stronger link, saying people are still being discharged from hospitals into homelessness, which only increases the severity of their illness in the long run, and drives up the costs of providing services for them.

"Having everyone on board is what's helping those people," Granum says.

Granum uses the example of a homeless woman he and the Recuperative Care Program is currently working with. A number of people worked with her — including medical staff, housing placement staff and other support services — for one year before she was able to receive and stay in long-term housing.

"Getting the people who are socially compromised and medically vulnerable (housed) takes a long term effort," Granum says. "It can't happen overnight."

## An Echo; Its presence confessed

By Kalyani Rajalingham

As its First Breath allotted at birth  
Was woe to the wretched on Earth  
'Twas left behind as a silent whisper  
As welfare to a warm heart's painful prayer  
Grasping for air; 'twas deaf to all but one ear  
And toil to prodigy's lovely heirs

For it never was and never will be  
But the dust that fell from the monarch's fleet  
That learned to while with joy while it may, here & there  
Returning, renewing all, as it hastens away  
As thunder sounded reality's cold truth  
The thought that it belongs lingers no longer,  
As but the remnants of a silent murmur

Blending with Nature, for every bud blooms with but care  
The echo is but a hope, a trust in another self from head to toe  
Foe or Friend, each voice's mirror is still a whisper,  
Though deaf be the ear that fashioned heart & mind for Fate to bear  
'Tis the Bearer of Confidence until silence sets it asunder

Walking, Singing of lightening, of thunder  
Will sound to the sullen sea or the willing hour  
Of conscience's first breath that was not permitted to linger  
And therefore, the echo; its presence confessed  
Signing all that it may; still falters,  
With nothing; indeed at its best

An Echo; Its presence confessed  
As a bloom of Nature,  
That Lives in the signature of her tears

© Kalyani Rajalingham

# Do you have airline miles you are willing to donate?



If so please contact Andy Freeze (202-462-0011)  
at the North American Street Newspaper  
Association to discuss how you can donate  
your miles for delegates to attend the street  
paper conference this summer in Chicago.

