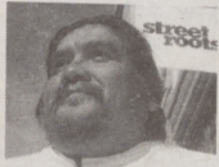


# Three years, 16 moves; One homeless camp's search for home

Recently, on my Facebook page, I wrote that sometimes you have to go through a journey to get to a journey. That's what this journey was like. It started with Eliese Baker, a Street Roots volunteer, and I talking about the advocacy I did in Seattle. Then I told her I'd like to take her up to Seattle to show her. Long story short, we went May 14 to Nickelsville.

## THE WANDERER

Leo Rhodes



Leo Rhodes is a street activist and homeless advocate. He is also a vendor with Street Roots and a regular contributor to the newspaper.

Leo will be reading one of his poems at the grand opening of the Bud Clark Commons, 10 a.m.-noon, Thursday June 2.

Nickelsville, when it gets its permanent property, is going to be an ecovillage. Because of its struggles, it looks like a tent city. The Nickelodeons have been working with the city of Seattle and waiting patiently for their permanent property. About seven months ago, the city of Seattle told the Nickelodeons that if they stayed at the old Fire Station No. 39 for six months, the city would have the permanent property ready for them. About a month ago the city said they wouldn't have the property ready on May 15 as promised. This put the Nickelodeons in a bind. Even though the city owned the old fire station and gave permission to Nickelsville to stay longer, the Nickelodeons had to think about the neighborhood and the promise they made to them: that they would be leaving on May 15. Also what about the next host neighborhood? They might not believe the Nickelodeons when they say their going to stay and leave at a certain time.

The call was put out to help Nickelsville. They got support, not only from Washington but also Michigan, California, United Kingdom and Oregon. On May 13, the Nickelodeons said they were going to have a black cat caravan from Nickelsville to City Hall. It was their last effort to ask the city for permanent property. They rallied at Nickelsville just before they were going to leave. Instead of going to City Hall, they were going to a new site to set up camp.

On Saturday, May 14, Eliese and I, along with Ibrahim Mubarak, the cofounder of Dignity Village, and Right to Survive, set off for Seattle. I wanted to show them Nickelsville, Tent City 3 and Tent City 4. First we had to start with the power lunch.

It's SHARE/WHEEL's governing body. SHARE (Seattle Housing And Resource Efforts) has 15 indoor shelters, two tent cities, housing for work program, and storage lockers. WHEEL (Women's Housing Equality Enhancement League) is SHARE's sister organization. WHEEL deals with homeless women's issues. I called Tent City 4 to ask where the power lunch was. They gave me the address. I said out loud, "That sounds familiar." When we got to the Nickelsville site, all these memories started coming back. The site is where they started: Almost 3 years and 16 moves they end up right back where they started.

Pitching up our fuchsia tents, in the early darkness of 4:30 a.m. About a week later all the police and arrests. That was on city property. We moved right next door to state property. Everywhere we moved the city threatened with arrests and fines. With the new mayor, McGinn, the Nickelodeons have been working with him toward permanent property.

The city was leading them on. There comes a point when you have to put a line in the sand and say, either you're with us, or we're going to do this without you. It's going to be interesting what the city does. I found out later the city is not going to do anything.

Here in Portland, we have Dignity Village, which started out like a tent city. Now they're an ecovillage.

I always think about the hardship the homeless have to go through to get a safe, secure place.

I recently went to the Coordinating Committee to End Homelessness here in

Portland and asked why they let the non-homeless pitch up their tents for the Rose Parade and cook out on the streets, but they don't let homeless people pitch up their tents to survive? Somebody said that the



PHOTO BY ELIESE BAKER

city buys a permit so they can pitch up their tents. So, what they are telling the homeless and the non-homeless is that you can pitch up a tent for leisure, but you can't pitch one up to survive. A gasp went around the room. Then I said, "There's something wrong with that." Some people were nodding their heads in agreement with me.

So, on June 10 people are going to be pitching up their tents for the Rose Parade.

Right to Survive, Street Roots and I are asking friends and allies to pitch a tent in protest. This isn't fair to let non-homeless pitch tents and the homeless not to pitch tents. If you can't make the parade route, we're asking to pitch a tent in your backyard. In both cases we're asking people to take pictures and send them to us at: r2spdx@gmail.com.

The author, right, talking with Nickelodeons at the site of Nickelsville's latest location.

THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY'S ROLE IN EXTENDING



TO END HOMELESSNESS IN WASHINGTON COUNTY

Washington County, the economic hub of the metro area, is recovering from the Great Recession but many of our neighbors in need are contending with the impact of the recession including facing homelessness. Washington County is a microcosm of the USA where some are doing very well, some are doing better and others are slipping into poverty and homelessness.

Washington County has many private/public partnerships in response to neighbors in need. But with cuts from state and federal government the ranks of the poor will grow just as the economy is improving. How can we respond to a crisis framed by the reality that for some it is the "best of times," for others it's the "worst of times?"

Saturday, June 4, 2011 - 8:30 to Noon

Cedar Hills United Church of Christ, 11695 SW Park Way, Beaverton

Keynote Speaker: Greg Van Pelt, CEO, Providence Health & Services, Oregon

Program Sponsor: Interfaith Committee on Homelessness of Washington County. Contact Person: Eric Canon, Chair of IFCH, 503-357-3282

What We Believe:

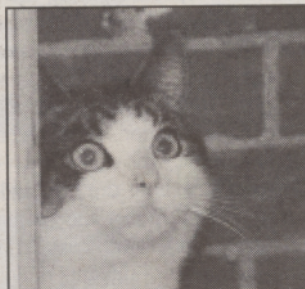
- ❖ Hardworking people should be able to afford decent and safe housing.
- ❖ Children succeed in school when they have a safe and secure home.
- ❖ Renting or owning a "home of their own" helps families succeed.

# REGIONAL GREEN BUILDING HOTLINE

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Office Cat Rooty sends wants to personally thank all the great men and women who came through on our paper towel drive! It's a tremendous help and keeps our vendor's hands clean. Thank you!