

Faith-based community observes Day of Homelessness Awareness

STAFF REPORTS

On Tuesday, Nov. 15, civic and religious leaders will join with congregations throughout Portland and Multnomah County to observe the second annual Day of Homelessness Awareness.

The Day of Homelessness Awareness aims to spotlight the challenge of homelessness in our community, to show appreciation for the many ways the faith community is already involved in supporting homeless people, and to engage even more congregations and members in the effort to end homelessness.

Of the nearly 5,000 individuals identified as homeless by the 2011 Point-in-Time Homelessness Survey, 1,331 represented homeless families with children and 458 homeless youth. There are more than 500 congregations in Portland alone, and almost 1,000 in Multnomah County. The faith community provides and underwrites all of the emergency shelter capacity for families in Multnomah County, in addition to supporting and caring for those who experience homelessness.

The day will begin with a "Walk of Awareness" at 7 a.m. on Nov. 15 at St. Andre Bessette Roman Catholic Parish (formerly the Downtown Chapel), West Burnside and Sixth Avenue. The walk will proceed to the new 13 Salmon Family Day Center at First Unitarian Church, 1011 SW 13th Ave., for a light reception.

Stops along the way will include the new Bud Clark Commons and O'Bryant Square. Both stops have connections to the faith community's involvement in homelessness. The Bud Clark Commons is home to Transition Projects. O'Bryant Square is the location of Potluck in the Park, a weekly meal provided free of charge that is strongly supported by congregations throughout Portland.

The walk will include three key "calls to action" for participants. The threefold call to action is structured around the theme of donate/volunteer/advocate. At three stops along the way, participants will be encouraged to donate coats and blankets or cash; volunteer with organizations that support people experiencing homelessness; and advocate on behalf of people experiencing poverty, hunger, and homelessness. Information on organizations and programs of advocacy at the local, state and national level will be provided.

'I've got something to contribute to this community'

BY COLE MERKEL
STAFF WRITER

Art is Nathan Roper's outlet to channel his energy. "It gives me a perspective," says Nathan. At times tumultuous, Nathan's life has taken him through addiction, prison and now, recovery. "That's what art is supposed to do — pull an emotion out of you. It may not be good, it might be disgust. It might be revulsion, but at least it's pulling something out of you."

"I always had an artist's soul," says Roper. "I never had the medium through which to express it. Because you're more sensitive and you've got to have an outlet to

VENDOR PROFILE Nathan Roper

channel that sensitivity, that hurt, that anguish, that rejection that you feel more than most people. Because you see the world differently."

Nathan was addicted to street heroin for thirty years and spent two years in prison. It was behind bars that Nathan discovered the power of art as a tool for self-expression. A fellow inmate offered Nathan his locker so long as Nathan drew him a different envelope every day for eighteen months. In conjunction with the other inmate's envelopes, Roper began to illustrate his own. "I started sending them home," reflects Roper. "My brother hung them on a wall. I figured next time I'd do one to where you'd get the whole collage and it would be one big picture. But, fortunately, I never went back to that place."

Drawing and illustration with pencils and gel pens are Nathan's preferred media because he appreciates the freedom and control it allows through hand-eye coordination. "They say you should find something you enjoy and this is probably the only thing I really do enjoy that I let hours fly by while I'm drawing. I can get lost

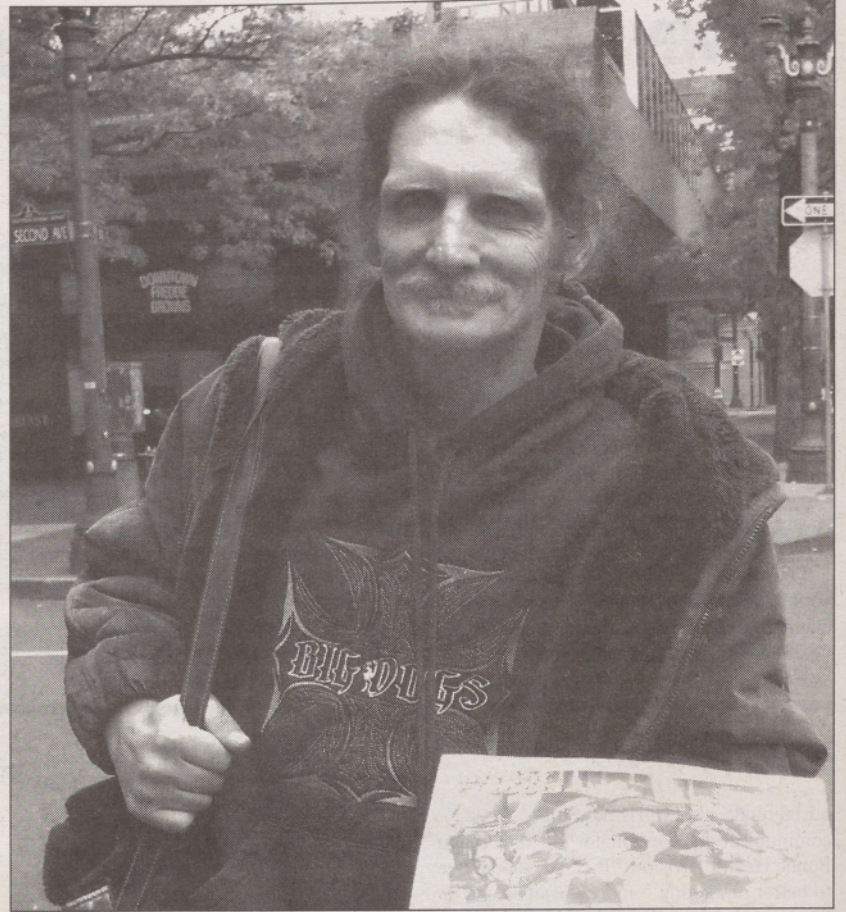


PHOTO BY COLE MERKEL

in it, especially if I'm in a warm surrounding — a whole day can go by. Looking out a window I can always look at a landscape and think, 'I can draw that.' My mind is always leaning toward that."

Growing up in the Bay Area, Roper spent much of his youth in Redding, Calif., a place, he says, unwelcoming to homeless individuals and drug users; "They wouldn't even allow methadone there because they said it added to the drug problem."

Upon his release from prison, Nathan had few places to go, and returned to Street Roots where he had been a vendor several years previous.

"That's one thing I like about Street Roots," he says. "You guys gave me a chance when nobody else would." In terms of selling, he says, "I don't want any favors. All I want is to just see what I can do. And I sell papers. That's why I love this job."

Selling drugs gave Roper the perspective to quit. "I actually quit dope selling heroin. Watching people in that constant state of desperation, coming up to me, needing something, willing to do anything," he says. "That's sad to be so reduced to that. That's what I hated about being strung out; you're so dependent on this thing that has what

you need and you're tore up from the floor up and you don't see it. And when I was selling, I saw it. Finally, that stuff in my pocket had no pull to me. It was just junk. I finally understood why they use the word junk. It's garbage!"

Of the places he has lived, Roper thinks that Portland and San Francisco are the most welcoming. "Being homeless, you don't get a good dose of humanity every day. You've got to reach and look hard to find the humanity in things." He finds that humanity by selling Street Roots; as a vendor, individuals acknowledge and accept him as human. "It pulls you into the community," he says. "They get used to you, and you become part of their lives."

Roper shows no signs of slowing down. He is in fact, only looking to create more. "I'm not done yet. I've got something to contribute to this community. The final epitaph hasn't been written on me yet. I'm still growing, I'm still learning and I'm going to do something for Portland because it's done something for me."

Nathan Roper sells Street Roots outside the Starbucks on NW 21st and Lovejoy.

Answers to puzzles on page 15

4	7	5	3	6	8	1	2	9
8	1	2	5	6	7	3	9	4
3	6	9	4	2	1	7	5	8
6	4	8	9	7	2	5	1	3
2	5	3	1	8	4	6	7	9
1	7	6	5	3	8	4	2	9
7	8	6	2	4	5	9	3	1
5	2	1	7	3	6	4	8	9
9	3	4	8	1	6	2	7	5

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VENDOR WORK ADS

Tibor S.: Available for any labor work around a house. 1-201-539-1888.

Cassidy Morse: Looking for work. Will do most anything, light and heavy. \$10 an hour, four-hour minimum. References supplied. Please call 503-224-5398 or Street Roots at 503-228-5657

Laura Owens: Available for domestic-type work, cleaning, dog walking, etc. Please call Street Roots, 503-228-5657 and leave a message for Laura regarding work ad.

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

Vendor Wish List

Donations keep Street Roots and our vendors working by keeping our operating costs low.

- Socks
- Lil Hotties
- Paper cups
- Hygiene items
- Towels
- First-aid supplies
- TriMet bus tickets/passes
- Printer paper
- Toilet paper

Seeing new faces selling Street Roots? Each week, more people sign up to become a Street Roots vendor and it's great to support new salesmen. Please make sure you buy from a badged vendor, confirming that they have attended the vendor orientation and are authorized to sell the newspaper. Your vendor will thank you!



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