

Arriving home after a long journey homeless

Street Roots vendor Charles Yost gets his key

BY COLE MERKEL
STAFF WRITER

Home is a place many of us have the privilege to take advantage of. It is a place to rest one's head and relax, a sanctuary with a hinged door to close the world out or invite it in. Creating a home doesn't necessarily take much: four walls and a roof, a bed, a kitchenette and bathroom with a few windows to let in the natural light.

Street Roots vendor Charles Yost had not had his own private space to call home since 1979 when he moved away from his family in Virginia. That is, until Dec. 15, when Northwest Pilot Projects secured him a unit at the Morrison Apartments, a LEED-Gold certified, income-contingent building across the street from Jeld-Wen Field. Together, we headed to his new apartment.

Charles spoke rapidly and excitedly as we rode MAX toward his new home. It was as if, in his head, he was composing and recomposing the narrative of his life that had led him to that exact moment in time: the years he spent travelling across the country with a concessions business, sleeping in tents and campers; his struggles with alcoholism; the decade of springs he spent in Portland, leaving before the autumn rain set in; the brief moment six years ago in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho, when he thought he had his life together again; six months of sobriety in Portland while selling Street Roots.

"This is a big thing for a guy who has never been permanent," Charles said in a matter of fact tone as he signed the lease and related documents. His left hand moved fluidly and readily across the page, suggesting that his three decades of drifting, which had prepared him for this reality, were finally ready to come to an end.

Yost arrived in Portland most recently on July 20 without plans to stay. He began selling Street Roots and attending AA meetings on July 22. "It got to a point," Charles said. "Where I was either going to get drunk or sell papers." He chose the latter and still attends AA daily. He has just

received his coin for five months of sobriety. "I camped out for the first two months; July through September, then moved into the Clark Center. I stayed in sobriety two months while camping. That's hard to do. I was going to meetings every morning. They kept me sober."

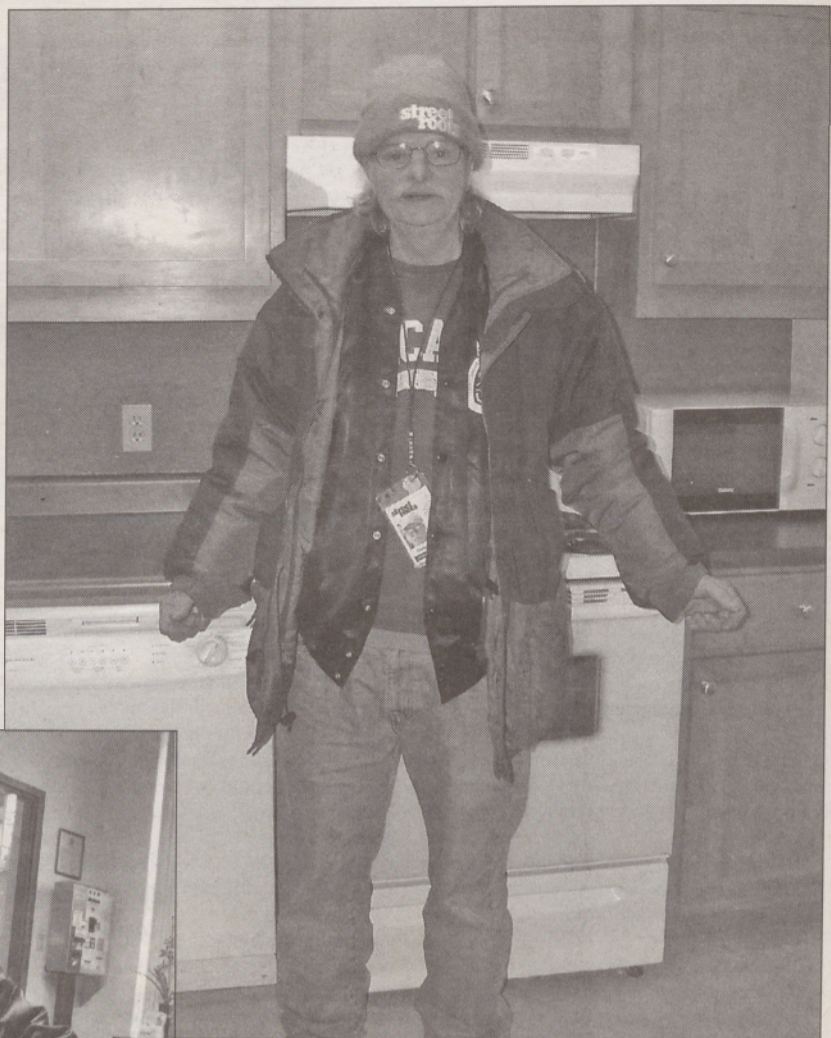
Yost resided in The Clark Center, a Transition Projects shelter that provides up to four months of short-term housing. "The Clark Center was a good stepping stone for me to getting in here," Charles said. "Getting off the street was the first step; getting into the Clark Center got the ball rolling."

"I knew it was going to be a waiting game," Yost said about finding permanent housing. "I didn't let it bother me. I knew it was going to happen sooner or later."

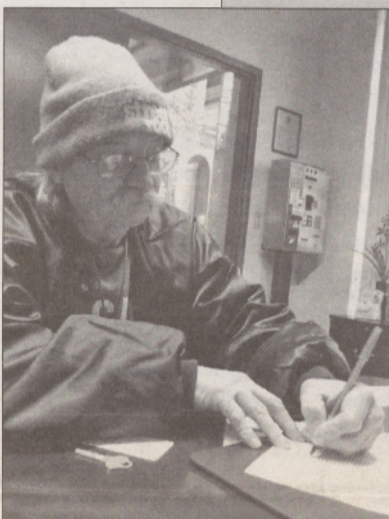
When Charles stepped into his apartment for the first time, the frenzied movements and rapid talk that had characterized the previous hour we had spent together slowed down. Then for a brief second, Charles stopped altogether and took a deep breath. "It's hard to believe this is happening," he said. "I'm shocked."

"Welcome home," Amanda Wynn, the assistant manager at the Morrison told him. "This is merry Christmas," Charles said. "I don't make plans, I go one day at a time and I can't say what's going to happen tomorrow, but I know where I'm at right now. I just walked into my house."

As Amanda gave Charles a tour of the building, his excitement continued to grow over things many of us take for granted: the



PHOTOS BY COLE MERKEL



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laundry room where he will be able to wash his clothes any time of the day or night, the community room with a bookshelf and computer. "Books, the Internet!" Charles said, awestruck. "I'm not very good at the Internet — but I can learn now!"

The excitement continued as we walked outside and Charles began exploring his new neighborhood. "This is where I'm going to be living. Look at this! Just look at what's around me! Look at the environment! I'm walking down the street I'm going to be

going down every day." He held his hands up in the air, across the street from Jeld-Wen Field, with a smile, thinking about the liveliness he will experience when the Timbers play next season.

"Tomorrow," he said with a chuckle. "I think I'll wake up in a dream and just look outside." After a lifetime of drifting, Charles finally had a place of his own to lay his head. "I've got a place to stay tonight. I can stay up as late or wake up as early as I want and turn the lights on. I might be awake all night and look out the windows to make sure this is here and not in the woods."

Answers to puzzles on page 15

ACMESE
BASST
ASIA
RUMMA
EST
TELE
EGIS
RO
ADSD
FID
REF
MAN
ODOR
TALC
ARCS
HERA
NUMEN

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

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



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