New center downtown will serve homeless and at-risk veterans

STAFF REPORTS

A new facility for veterans will open its doors April 16 in hopes of reaching homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless.

The new Community Referral and Resource Center, or CRRC, will open in the heart of Portland's downtown, on the Red and Blue Max Line, at the corner of First Avenue and Oak Street. Portland was one of 15 cities across the country to be selected for a CRRC, a pilot project of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"The VA can be a complex and overwhelming system for people," says Program Director Cathy Spofford. "The goal was one-stop shopping in an area that was accessible to people."

Spofford said the CRRC will be a place where veterans can connect with services for housing, employment, physical and mental health care. There will be four social workers on sight, peer support specialists, and channels to housing through the VA's shelter bed support and the federal Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program.

"We're moving a lot of services into one spot downtown where people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless can access it," Spofford says it the new facility will bring services that might otherwise have to travel to the VA Medical Center on "the hill" at OHSU. "It might be easier than going to Vancouver or up to the hill."

Eventually, Spofford says, the site will have a computer bank for employment and housing searches and a clothing closet. "We don't want to repeat any services that are out there, but we're trying to fill the gaps that veterans might have," Spofford says.

'Never give up on hope'

BY COLE MERKEL
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Willie Bradford has strong, defined features: large hands, broad shoulders, a tall body, a deep voice and a big smile. When Bradford speaks, his words trail out softly. He smiles a lot and laughs often, alluding to a calm, collected sense of spirit that he has found over the course of 56 years of life.

VENDOR PROFILE
Willie Bradford

"It feels good when you've peace in your life," Bradford says. "We all have problems but I never give up on hope. That's one of my things: never give up on hope for nothing."

Three elements that truly drive Bradford's existence are spirituality, sports and community, which tend to overlap.

He finds community through his customers and sometimes exchanges spiritual literature for the newspaper with his more religious customers. "That's a fun thing because I like to read," says Bradford. Mostly, though, Bradford's approach to community involves getting the message of as many Street Roots into the community as possible.

"The vendors get the newspaper, we give it out, we have to give it away. And that's good for the community, especially because it helps a lot of homeless people have hope – the ones that really want to do something for themselves as a way out. Street Roots will help you if you want to help yourself. It's a very good paper."

After growing up in Chicago, Bradford moved to the Pacific Northwest to play a few seasons of basketball at Washington State University. He has umpired baseball, works out often, and likes to bowl. He says he keeps his mind sharp by playing a lot of chess. Bradford, married with three grown sons, says he would like to coach basketball some day and has a dream of going back to school to become a physical education teacher. Until then, he is considering taking a few classes to improve his computer skills.

PHOTO BY COLE MERKEL

Thanks in part to Northwest Pilot Project, and "by the grace of God," Bradford is back in housing after a period of homelessness. The newspaper helps him supplement his rent payments. "I really wanted to sell the newspaper because I really like to work. I like relating to people. It's really a good thing for me."

Bradford can be found most days selling near Voodoo Donuts on Southwest Second Avenue. Stop by and say hello.

Vendor Wish List

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

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

Answers to puzzles on page 15

L	A	E	M		D	E	T	A	R		S	B	L	A
A	N	N	A		E	V	I	L	O		E	U	O	R
H	T	A	E	R	B	E	M	A	S	E	H	T	N	I
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6	1	9	7	8	4	3	5	2
7	3	4	2	5	9	8	1	6
8	4	1	3	6	5	9	2	7
5	7	2	1	9	8	6	3	4
3	9	6	4	2	7	5	8	1
9	6	3	5	4	2	1	7	8
4	5	7	8	1	6	2	9	3
1	2	8	9	7	3	4	6	5

STREET ROOTS PHOTO

Metro Candidates Housing Forum

Candidates for Metro addressed an audience at the First Unitarian Church on April 9 to talk about housing issues. The discussion was sponsored by Oregon Opportunity Network, JOIN, 211Info and Street Roots. Left to right are District 6 candidates Jonathan P. Levine and Bob Stacey; District 5 candidates Terry Parker, Helen Ying, Michael Durrow and Sam Chase; and District 3 candidate Craig Dirksen. The candidates were each asked the same questions on issues of affordable housing, inclusionary zoning, gentrification and blending transportation and other community development opportunities with housing equity.