



# 'Domicile unknown'

STREET ROOTS PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

*Multnomah County releases its first report on how many homeless people died on our streets last year*

**BY JOANNE ZUHL**  
STAFF WRITER

**L**aurie Crow would have been 54 on Dec. 27, 2011. Instead, she became one of 47. Only a few weeks before her birthday, she died curled up in her sleeping bag in a meadow near Going Street. Her partner, Clarence, was next to her, awake and listening as she slept through daybreak. What he was hearing, in fact, was her body cooling in the December chill. It was Dec. 7. The other 46 were also homeless, and all died on the streets of Portland in 2011.

Forty-seven: Nearly 1 a week. That is the tally compiled in a groundbreaking report co-published by Multnomah County and Street Roots to better understand the toll taken by homelessness. The report is a review of homeless deaths recorded by the Multnomah County Medical Examiner's office. While similar reports have been compiled in Seattle, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco and Philadelphia, this is the first of its kind for Portland.

"It was really shocking, the diversity of the group of folks. It really was as diverse as our community: age range, men and women, ethnicity," said Multnomah County Commissioner Deborah Kafoury, who helped spearhead the count. "People like to think – to distance themselves from this problem – that that could never be me or anyone I know, but in reality, that's not the case."

The report, titled "Domicile Unknown," is only an initial view through the lens. It includes only those cases that cross the medical examiner's office, namely those not under the care of a physician who died from specific causes or circumstances such as accidents or substance abuse. It does not encompass what the county acknowledges are many others who have died homeless who may have been receiving medical care, such as those who went to an emergency room before death. But it lays the

groundwork for future information that touches the larger population on the streets.

For privacy, the report does not list names or specific circumstances surrounding each death. But those who died in 2011 ranged in age from 18 to 68, and the median age of death was 49. Eleven died of natural causes, 28 from accidental causes, including trauma or intoxication. There were four suicides, two homicides and two of undetermined causes. All but seven were men.

"I want to really show the community a different picture of homelessness in Multnomah County," Kafoury said. "To help people understand that having homelessness in our community affects all of us, and it's not just about the morality of whether we should allow people to sleep on the streets, but that it affects the fabric of our community. Having a place to live makes people more productive, contributing economically and socially. It makes people healthier, and that it really is a basic right to have a safe decent place to sleep at night."

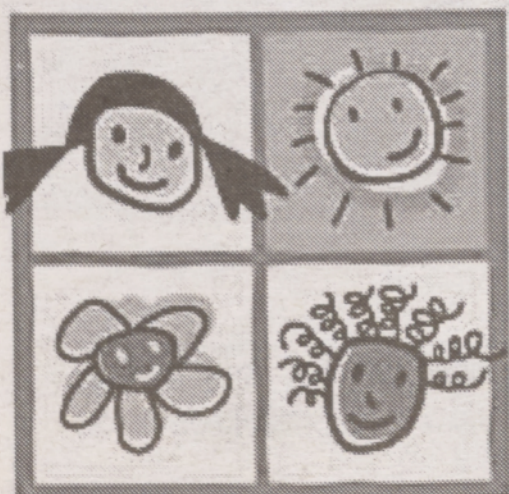
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— DEBORAH KAFOURY  
MULTNOMAH COUNTY COMMISSIONER

The process started simple enough: In 2010, with the urging of the Multnomah County Health Department, the Medical Examiners office added a check box on forms for "domicile unknown." It gave the medical examiners a new category for people determined homeless after authorities exhausted all

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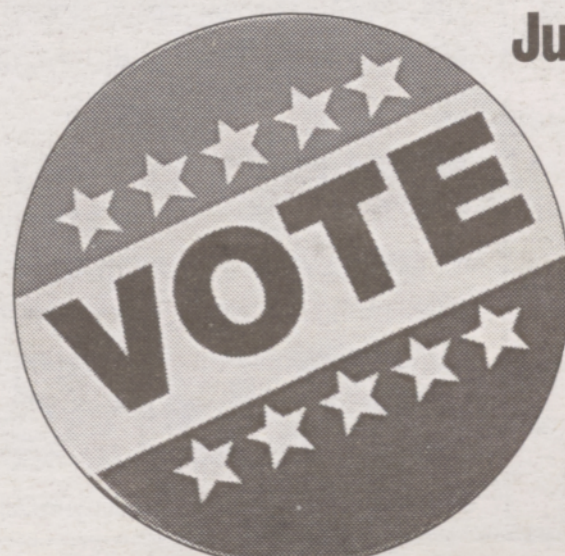
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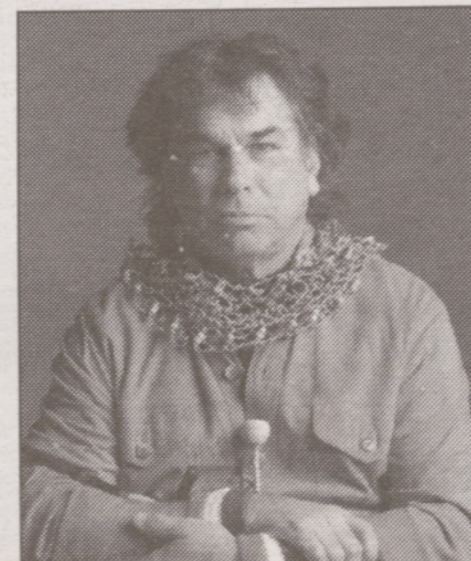
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