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A man on the move

BY KARA DIMITRUK
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Even though you may not recognize him, Kenny Chow isn't exactly a new vendor. He gave Street Roots and Portland a try a few years ago. But it was in Seattle where he really earned his vending chops, working with Street Roots' sister paper Real Change. He commuted between Salem and Seattle on weekends to be with his family.

His roots in Seattle are strong. There, Kenny built a rapport with his customers at Kirkland PCC, a natural foods grocery store, and he developed a camaraderie with the fellow vendors, enough to receive the honors of Vendor of the Week and then Vendor of the Year. "I had a good spot at Kirkland PCC. People know me. I walked into the store and was the man."

VENDOR PROFILE
Kenny Chow

PHOTO BY COLE MERKEL

Now he has decided to give Portland and Street Roots another shot, and his time here has been sprinkled with more new beginnings and change. He has brought his own mantra, which he learned from his uncle and his own experiences prior to Real Change: be polite, work hard and be a good representation of yourself and others.

He first became a vendor at Real Change for the "leg up" to help make ends meet during a difficult time. But he's continued to work as a vendor here at Street Roots even though he has a job and goes to school.

"I do it because it really helps with my money situation," he says. "I also like getting out and talking to people. I've always done this type of work, whether it was selling candy or candles."

It is also why he loves it here: "I make a few dollars for myself but also represent Street Roots. It's about getting the word out and representing as best I can. I give Street Roots a good name and people get to know who we are – it definitely works. It helps people get on their feet, whether it's a part-time or a full-time job."

The clothes support the man. He sports baby blue and white Nike Jordan's that match his polo. He listens to Christian hip-hop artists who encourage to "stay positive and stay focused. It all helps me to keep my eyes on the prize."

Kenny's attitude has been fruitful: He has found a location that shows promise – the New Seasons on Southeast Hawthorne. "This spot is good. People are nice."

In Portland and at Street Roots, he's faced the challenges we all experience when moving somewhere new: putting our roots down and developing relationships in a new place.

"I am the new guy on the block but I really feel Portland, Street Roots, and this spot are a blessing." He emphasizes the importance of the vendors: "Everyone that sells papers is vendor of the year or week."

He is also starting a new school year, registering for classes to finish his two-year degree, and starting a new job at the Nike store. "It's a dream come true working for Nike. I worked and finally bought a pair of red and white '89 Jordan's that came out when I was in fourth grade."

His roots extend in Portland, but he maintains his network in Seattle, visiting as often as possible to stop in at Real Change, say "hi" to the store at his old turf, but mostly to see his family and 9-year-old daughter, another source of inspiration. "They keep me focused."

It's all this that motivates him to keep his eyes on the prize.

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Fallen Off the Edge

Answers to puzzles on page 15

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1	7	3	6	9	2	8	4	5

VENDOR WORK ADS

Dependable, mature person interested in assisting ethical and safe person(s) with house sitting, pet care, plant care, yard work, laundry, organizational projects, etc. Please call 503-228-5657 and leave your contact information, preferably a name and email address. References available upon request.

Will do housework, mowing lawns, laundry, babysitting or house sitting. Contact Laura through Street Roots 503-228-5657

CORRECTIONS

The headline for the interview with Nichole Maher incorrectly listed her title. Maher is the new president of Northwest Health Foundation.

Please report any errors to our managing editor, Joanne Zuhl, at 503-228-5657, or write to joanne@streetroots.org

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