

From Land Ho to Right 2 Dream Too, a look back from one year on

Checking my e-mails and working on some of my project in the Street Roots office, I was interrupted by an excited vendor. He asked if I had seen an article in The Portland Tribune.

His eyes lit up as he explained that a man wanted to start a tent city, and that I should read the article. I told him I would. The next day the same guy asked if I read the article. "I forgot all about it," I told him. Then I told him, "I'll read it tonight after I finish all my work." This went on a few more times. I kept forgetting to read the article. He finally brought in the article and placed it in front of me and said, "Here

read it." So I read it. Then he said, "See, he wants to start a tent city." I looked at him and said, "Not really. He just wants to work with the homeless to use his land. He replied, "to start a tent city. You should jump on this before someone else does."

I e-mailed a friend, Ibrahim Mubarak, and asked what he think about this article. Ibrahim emailed me back and replied, "Sounds like this guy wants to use the homeless against the city." I e-mailed back, "Yes, that's true, but we can use him too." It's right downtown, in your face, and we may never get this offer ever again. It's the most ideal place." A little while later Ibrahim called me. We discussed it a little further. Ibrahim told me some guy was talking to him about the same thing. But Ibrahim didn't understand him. Then Ibrahim finished and said we need to ask Right 2 Survive, a group of homeless activists he works with.

We went to Right 2 Survive meeting and presented our proposal of starting a tent city. They loved the idea and the vote was unanimous to work on starting a tent city. But nobody knew how to contact the owners. At the next meeting, Dale Hardaway (I knew Dale from work we had done together in Seattle) said, "He made contact with the owners and set up a meeting with them."

At the meeting we introduced ourselves, Ibrahim was the co-founder of Dignity Village, homeless advocate, went before the city commissioners many times to talk about the need for shelters and tent cities. Mike Dee talked about legal aspects homelessness. Michael Callaghan spoke about speaking in front of city commissioners also. I spoke about starting a tent city in Seattle and running a tent city, and both indoor and outdoor shelters. Dale Hardaway smiled big and said, "I've worked with Leo up in Seattle. But all I want to do is make the contacts. So my job is done. I got you all together.

The owners introduced themselves Michael Wright took the lead and talked about his long battle with the city about his property. He said he didn't want the property to just sit there empty. He wanted to do something with it.

So we told them about our hope to start a tent city. There are too many homeless people on the streets and not enough shelter or affordable housing, we need to do something now.

An agreement was made that Right to Survive with its advocates, supporters and people that knew how to run a tent city would take the lead in training the homeless. Another agreement was that the camp would pay for all the bills.

The owners also said, "They were still going to try and sell the property, a buy out clause was added."

Everything was set a contract was going to be made for one year.

After the meeting was over we were all very excited and couldn't wait to tell everybody at the next Right to Survive meeting that everything was a go.

At the next Right 2 Survive meeting we gave a debriefing about our meeting with the owners. Everybody was happy to learn that everything went well and were excited to get started on our big project. One thing we asked of everybody was to keep this a secret. Those of us that have been through this kind of project know that there are other forces that try and prevent this kind of thing.

One of the biggest issue's was getting liability insurance. We also worked on getting a nonprofit status, board members, the materials tents tarps blankets, etc.

E-mails were going back and forth early on are when Ibrahim dubbed the project "Land Ho." The next time I saw Ibrahim I smiled and said, "Land Ho?" Ibrahim looked at me and started laughing saying, "Yeah Land Ho." I started laughing also and said, "That's cool."

In one meeting we were talking about what the place would look like. One lady said, "It should have shrubs, flowers and trees." Most of the people were agreeing with her. I said, "No, that would take up too much space and people might grab them and throw them around." I suggested a chain link fence. Nobody like that idea. Then somebody raised the idea of using doors as a fence. In the meeting of how to make this fence, one issue kept coming up: with all the hammering and sawing, we need a distraction. Because if the people see it, they're going to call the cops and make us take it down. So we need a distraction. Nobody had an answer.

The name came from Ptery. Ptery wrote on a piece of paper and gave it to Mike Dee.

Then they both started laughing. So much that it disrupted the meeting. So we asked what they were laughing at. Ptery stated that he came up with the name "Right to Dream." Then Mike added, "Too" to the end. R2DToo. Everybody started laughing saying, "Yes R2DToo, R2DToo."

Now we pretty much have all our ducks in a row except for the start date. Why don't we start on Homeless Advocacy Day, Oct 10, Trillium suggested. "On that day, people all over the world are asked to do some kind of action dealing with homeless." It was unanimous. everybody loved the idea.

Then we had the signing of the contracts. Everything was set to start but we still had no answer to a distraction while we built the door fence.

On Oct. 5, I went to a meeting underneath the Burnside Bridge. It was about a new thing called "Occupy Portland." At the time I never thought of Occupy Portland being a distraction.

On Oct. 8, We started to build the door fence. When I was their some of the Occupy people marched right by us asking us to join them. We would of but we were working on our own project.

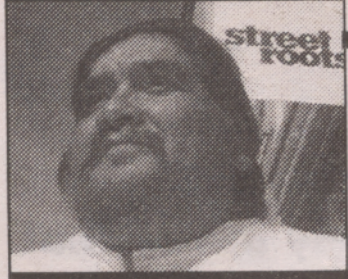
On Oct. 10 we started Right 2 Dream Too. A little while later two guys showed up from the city asking what was going on. Ibrahim and Mike Dee told them were starting a rest area. The guys from the city said, "You're starting a tent city?" "No," Ibrahim said, "It's a rest area" then started to explain the concept. The guys from the city said, "Oh you mean a tent city?" This went back and forth. Then one of the guys said we were in violation of city ordinance, and later they said somebody complained. It was a stalemate.

So now the city is claiming Right 2 Dream Too be a recreational campsite and charging the rest area. They're pretty much trying to fine Right 2 Dream Too out of existance.

Right 2 Dream Too is a rest area where homeless people can come in and get a good night's sleep, be safe and secure. This is much needed. With the sweeps, and the sidewalk management, one of the questions homeless people always ask, "If you don't want me to sleep here where do I go?" The reply sometimes is a shelter. The shelters are full and there's not enough affordable housing. It's insane.

When I visit the rest area I watch as single men, couples, and single women come to sleep. Its really great to see. There also a lot of success stories empowerment, and other things I'll write about later.

On Oct. 10, Right 2 Dream Too will have been around for one year. A lot has happened since then I'm really excited to write about.



THE WANDERER

Leo Rhodes

Leo Rhodes is a street activist and homeless advocate. He is also a vendor with Street Roots and a regular contributor to the newspaper.

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