

Spring

By Misty Thornton

As the sun rises up over the vast skyline of Portland. It peeks its weary head through the breakings of the dark dreary clouds. You glance up and take in the rays, but soon the slight feel of the tiniest drops will soon be felt. With the cherry blossoms along the waterfront becoming full of life and color. The mix of the winter and spring seasons can be witnessed throughout the landscapes of tall buildings and lush green lawns aligning the streets.

The spring season is a time where it reflects on the saying, "Out with the old, in with new." It is a time for families to get into the winter-filled closets and do that long dreaded spring cleaning. Or it is a time when the flowers that had long been planted years back, blooming to the fullest and brightest colors. The air will seem cleaner, but filled with certain dampness.

The nights will come sooner than the winter season as clocks would be set forth. The days will seem shorter and the sun hitting the skyline will bring a sense of waking up way too early in the morning. You can now sit upon your front porch and enjoy that morning cup of coffee and read that early morning addition of The Oregonian without feeling the epic chill of those brutal winter mornings.

Whatever you choose to do to bring in the beautiful, vast spring season. It all can be enjoyed by the warmer days and the beauty of the city as it comes alive for the oncoming next seasons. You can enjoy mid-day walk with the dog now, without feeling the onset of the downpour of rain.

Teenagers fill the parks and basketball courts. As families travel for their afternoon picnics without having to run from the bitter cold or the onset of rain.

No matter what you enjoy with the change of seasons, and the vast variety of things that come with the change, it is always good to stop and take in the beauty of what the spring season brings to the city.

Public safety means addressing mental health

BY DOREEN BINDER
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

For more than a decade, there have been, understandably, proposals about public safety, homelessness and downtown streets. Portland erected one of the earlier sit-lie ordinances in the country — a law that prevented lying or sitting on sidewalks. To some extent, one could have predicted the supporters and opponents of the ordinance. Many businesses supported sit-lie, citing concerns about access to their establishments, and customers fearing for their safety. Meanwhile, social services and activists for ending homelessness largely lined up against the ordinance — with concerns about civil rights and scapegoating. But because Portland is Portland, and because we tend to do things our own way, unexpected alliance formed too. Social service agencies began participating in public safety conversations and partnering with police and businesses. Meanwhile, the Portland Business Alliance became a vocal advocate for the development of Portland's remarkable Bud Clark Commons, and they funded expanded hours at Transition Projects Community Service Center to address much-needed additional showers for people living on the streets. Sit-lie stood until 2009, when a Multnomah County circuit judge ruled the ordinance unconstitutional.

In 2013, Oregon is once again number one in per capita homelessness. There are more people living on the streets than at any time in the last decade. At the same time, the social safety net that supports so many people is once again in jeopardy.

Shelters are full. The Clark Center, Transition Projects' southeast shelter program that serves nearly 700 people each year, may have to close on July 1, 2013 due to funding cuts from the City of Portland — returning all of those 700 men back to the streets searching for alternative solutions.

The reality is that the most vulnerable people to victimization, crime and abuse are homeless persons; there is no safety or security for anyone who is living on the streets. They are the first to be robbed, the first to be assaulted. We know from our own work on homelessness and sexual assault that homeless women have almost universally been subjected to sexual violence. Both homeless women and men suffer sexual assault at alarming rates.

Perhaps most visible to Portlanders is the increase of individuals in severe states of mental health crises who are on the streets. There are people on the streets who are desperately sick — lost in their own worlds while they respond to psychoses and trauma.

The state of services and housing for people suffering from severe mental health disorders is woefully inadequate and has been so since the early 1970s when our country dismantled the mental health system without having a solid plan in place for replacing it. Our collective lack of a response to this crisis — to this profound human suffering — has remained a shameful blot on us as a society.

It is time for a public safety conversation about downtown streets — but a different kind of conversation than we had before. Foremost, the conversation should not

primarily be a conversation about homelessness. We should focus on perpetrators of illegal and volatile behaviors — not classes of people. The conversation must shift from people with nowhere else to go to include those who target people without homes, the middleclass and businesses. Their behaviors must be part of the conversation. We cannot afford to be a polarizing city.

We must talk seriously about mental health. Our partners at the state, city, county and federal governments must join this conversation — they are the parties who remain centrally responsible for changing this dire situation that engulfs so many people.

And we have to talk about the utter mess that is being handed down from the federal government — the irresponsible and often inhumane action called sequestration. It is a policy that is cutting holes into the Portland safety net at the time when we need it the most.

We are not happy that there are people sleeping and living on the streets and under bridges. Street homelessness engorged in Portland as a major force more than 40 years ago. Many of today's social-service providers formed in response to the crisis. 40-plus years is long enough to let this horrific issue remain unresolved. It is time, for serious planning and serious action. To get there we cannot be a city that meets — we should be a city that acts and makes change. Now is the time.

Doreen Binder is the executive director of Transition Projects

Clothes

By Ron Sanford

Do the clothes make a man, or the man the clothes?
Do you prefer poetry or prose?
Lots of gimmicks to try on now, it is past the time
Like a Macedonian misfit far out to sea

Styles have quickly changed, I still have my own
Every convention to use. I do

Chartreuse boas splattered with glitz
Anything goes, were all just having fun
Transform the culture as we go
We are the future, out on loan

Your Car

By David Mair

Your car smelled just like you.
Though I never knew the smell of you 'til I smelled your car.
Now I wish I could smell you to know what your car smells like.



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