

## EDITORIAL

## Street Roots is ready for anything, large or small

Jim and Street Roots' Vendor Coordinator Cole Merkel started around the same time. Jim was a Street Roots vendor. Cole was a Jesuit Volunteer a year out of college and looking to make a difference in the world.

For more than a year, Cole watched Jim struggle to get sober. Jim slept in the office doorway and spent rainy afternoons in the Street Roots office making calls to treatment centers.

Jim went to meetings and made honest attempts to find community and remain sober. The more time they spent together, the more Cole began to learn about his life. Jim had experienced years of substance abuse and has a traumatic brain injury that still effects him today.

When Jim got into an apartment last summer, the Street Roots staff couldn't have been happier for him. He'd come

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"Having stopped drinking when I started at Street Roots in solidarity with so many of the vendors who struggle with addiction, I told Jim about the time last summer I'd poured an entire bottle of grain alcohol down my kitchen sink that one of my housemates had left behind," says Cole. "It was one of the most liberating experiences I have ever had."

Without a second thought, Jim pulled the bottle out of his backpack and dumped it into the trash can. The smell of cheap vodka emanated. Jim wiped his hands together and put them in the air as if fully resigning his past to make room for the present. He went straight to an AA meeting, and as soon as he got back to his apartment gave me a call to let me know he was OK.

Jim's story is not unique.

"In the few years I've been at Street Roots as the vendor coordinator, I've befriended hundreds of vendors and witnessed countless moments of victory and failure," says Cole. "The thing that places Street Roots in such a unique position to serve is that we are a small and dedicated crew working to make a tangible difference in this world. Some days, that work is as vast as facilitating a social media campaign to save \$2 million in services from the city's chopping block. Other days, it is as simple and profound as having a supportive conversation with someone that encourages him not to take that next drink."

While Jim is now housed and sober, there are countless other vendors struggling with the harsh realities of urban poverty who are using Street Roots to empower themselves toward something better.

At Street Roots, we're ready for anything, and we are in it for the long haul. That's precisely why we need you now more than ever. Find out ways to give on the back page and we appreciate your love and support.

## Vendor's life inspires family's support of others

A month ago, Paul Gefroh came to talk to me. It had been two years since he had lost his son. The memory of Nick is still very fresh in his heart.

We talked about Nick's involvement with Street Roots, his childhood and his compassion for others. Nick was a former board member and vendor with Street Roots and had sold the paper on Northeast Ninth and Broadway, in front of the old Portland Teachers Credit Union (now OnPoint).

The one thing Paul and I had in common, even though we didn't know each other well, is that we had seen his son at his absolute best and at his absolute worst.

Nick was a true Oregonian, growing up in Estacada. He had a vast knowledge of sports and the Grateful Dead. He loved the Oregon Ducks, the Portland Trail Blazers and the New York Mets. He had a smile and a laugh that was warm and charming, capturing the hearts and minds of those around him.

Nick struggled with addiction on and off for most of his adult life. When he was doing well, Nick contributed to the world around him by mentoring others. During his time at Street Roots he not only helped vendors, he helped contribute to the future vision of Street Roots by serving on the board of directors.

One vendor in particular that Nick looked out for was Don G. — a gentleman who had cerebral palsy. Don was restricted to a wheelchair and would journey to Street Roots every day from a nursing home on the eastside of Portland to sell the paper in the Lloyd District. Nick would regularly help Don to his location and check on him to make sure hustlers on the streets were not taking advantage of him. Nick was a patient and caring human being.

When Nick wasn't doing well, an alcohol and heroin addiction rendered him hard to handle. He drifted in and out of homelessness and time again broke the hearts of those around him, especially his family.

Sometimes there is no explanation for the storm that builds inside a person. Regardless of how many lighthouses remained lit for Nick, in the end, the storm was too strong and consuming. Nick passed away at the age of 41.

In the end, Nick's family decided to create a vendor fund in his name. We are able to honor Nick and by doing so we're supporting his memory and supporting the vendors.

Readers can give a donation to the fund by writing a check to Street Roots, Attn: Nick Gefroh Street Roots Vendor Fund, or by giving online at [www.streetroots.org](http://www.streetroots.org). All donations will go toward supplies for vendors to be successful.

Thank you to Nick's family and everyone who supports our vendors.



## DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at [israel@streetroots.org](mailto:israel@streetroots.org) or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.



Drawing by Helen Hill. You can see and read more about her work on page 15.

## Our mission

Street Roots creates income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty by producing a newspaper and other media that are catalysts for individual and social change.

Street Roots publishes every two weeks, launching on Fridays, and is available exclusively through our street vendors or by subscription. We are proud members of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers.

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## Board of Directors

Bruce Anderson (Chairman), Michael Anderson (Vice-chairman), Heather Stadick (Treasurer), Eddy Barbosa (Secretary), Rich Rodgers, Brad Taylor, Leo Rhodes, Ken Hawkins, Nora Coon, Darren Alexander

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## Street Roots Rose City Resource

Street Roots publishes the Rose City Resource, a comprehensive booklet of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. To inquire about getting an order of the Rose City Resource for distribution, please write to [pdxrosecityresource@gmail.com](mailto:pdxrosecityresource@gmail.com). Resources are also available online at [www.rosecityresource.org](http://www.rosecityresource.org).

## Vendors

Street Roots vendors buy the newspapers for 25 cents each and sell them for \$1, keeping the 75 cents in profit for themselves. In order to keep the cost low to our vendors, we receive additional support from donations and in-kind contributions.



**75¢**  
goes directly to the vendor who sold you the paper

**25¢**  
goes toward printing costs

Vendor orientations are at 1 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Street Roots office.