



PHOTO BY ROBERT BRITT

HUNGER from page 1

the same problems seen in actual suburbs like Gresham.

Roughly 46 percent of Portland Public School's 47,523 students qualified for free and reduced meals in 2012. In Park Rose and David Douglas school districts, both of which serve East Portland, the numbers get higher.

The most recent numbers for Park Rose have the district's enrollment at 1,587 students; 1,176 of these kids qualify for free and reduced meals. David Douglas faces a similar situation 80 percent of the district's 10,538 students qualify for the meal program.

The hunger trend continues in Gresham and neighboring Fairview, Wood Village, and Troutdale. In the Reynolds school district, which serves these communities, 76 percent of its students qualify for free and reduced meals. South in the Centennial school district, which also serves Portland, that number is 69 percent. Five of the district's seven elementary schools have rates in the 80s. Further east in Gresham-Barlow, the

district average drops to 55 percent.

So how should a suburb respond? The sad answer is it might not be able to.

Gresham's Response

"With issues surrounding poverty and homelessness in Gresham, we can't keep up," says Gresham City Councilor Mario Palermo.

Councilor Palermo is a benefits coordinator for the Oregon Department of Human Services. Being a Gresham councilor, he explains, isn't a full-time paid gig like being a Portland city commissioner. It's volunteer work, he says, which is why he's kept his day job. Palermo also lives in Rockwood and has seen first hand the poverty there. In fact, he's one of three Gresham city councilors who live in the notoriously impoverished neighborhood. He says small city governments like Gresham just can't muster the same resources that larger cities like Portland can. They also don't have the infrastructure to do so, which is why, he says, Gresham relies heavily on nonprofits to administer services to those in

need.

According to numbers provided by City of Gresham spokeswoman Laura Shepard, in 2013, Gresham gave area nonprofits \$834,041 in federal money as part of its community revitalization program. This included money for job training and \$83,068 to groups helping with rental assistance, and transitional and affordable housing.

Gresham gave no money to hunger relief efforts, according to Shepard.

Palermo says there's still a lot more that needs to be done. In particular, he says there's not enough affordable housing in Gresham. But according to some it's the concentration of low rent and affordable housing in Gresham and East Portland that's driving much of the current need in the area.

Affordable Housing's Suburban Drift

"People came because there was low rent," says Human Solutions Executive

An overview of SnowCap's warehouse, which is undergoing an expansion to keep up with the demand for food among low-income families in Rockwood.

See HUNGER, page 5

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