

EDITORIAL

City Hall plays the wrong hand
with street sweeps

Running the City of Portland is hard work. But being able to work in a collaborative effort toward a common goal shouldn't be.

Mayor Charlie Hales boldly declared last week that enforcing sidewalk laws against people experiencing homelessness — and we assume the mentally ill — wasn't about homelessness at all. "This is about lawlessness," the mayor proclaimed to the media.

Not one mention of the public health crisis on our streets or the lack of funding for homeless or mental health services. Nothing was mentioned about how the business community, residents, local government, advocates, social-service providers and law enforcement can work together to tackle these tough problems. Not a peep about an increased investment for rent assistance to target some of the hard-to-reach folks on our

streets.

The message sent to the media and Portland was simple: We're cleaning up lawless behavior that we've tolerated for far too long.

Street Roots and others saw years of hard work about how to frame this issue to get common Portlanders to engage in working together to solve homelessness flash before our eyes.

Then the police went out

and swept homeless camps.

That's not to say some camps shouldn't be swept or at least addressed. People experiencing homelessness and poverty have a responsibility to care for their property and the property of others while maintaining an orderly environment. If there is open drug use, violence or people not picking up their trash, we expect the city to react.

The reality is these kinds of enforcement strategies happen all of the time in Portland, based upon complaints from residents and reports of crime. What doesn't typically occur is a media strategy that devolves into a feeding frenzy over a debate about lawlessness, using the homeless as scapegoats.

Sitting quietly in the background are lobbyists for the business community who are pushing an agenda to government and the media that tourism is hurting and the business climate is threatened because of the visible homeless downtown.

Meanwhile, anyone walking through Portland's core would see tourism and business booming.

What's the solution?

The solution is to work together to develop strategies to increase our affordable housing stock, to increase rent assistance dollars for people on the streets, and to maintain targeted enforcement on people who are clearly out of line. The solution is not to enforce decades-old perspectives that research and history have shown do absolutely nothing to solve the problem of poverty and homelessness in urban America.

What Portland needs are leaders who listen to experts in the field and in government that have been successfully housing people for years.

Street Roots is ready to work alongside both traditional and non-traditional partners to get the job done. What we can't do is sit on the sidelines and watch individuals and families in poverty be demonized in our community.

Housing stability makes economic and social sense. Everyone deserves to have a safe place to call home, regardless of circumstances, and everyone benefits when they do.

Turning a troubling event into a lasting lesson

I've been an NBA fan for a long, long time. I've also worked with homeless people in Portland and Seattle for more than 15 years.

When I read that Houston Rockets forward and Portland native Terrence Jones allegedly stomped on a homeless man's leg only one block from my office in Portland, my heart sank.

The alleged incident brought me back to a time several years ago when a friend and I witnessed a teenager kick a homeless man in a doorway in downtown Portland. After making sure that the man was OK, my friend and I chased the kid four blocks before he gave up and confronted us. We gave the kid two choices. We were either going to call the police or he was going to have to go back and talk to the guy he kicked.

The teenager, scared and shaking, sat with all of us for the next hour talking about the realities of homelessness, including just how vulnerable people actually are. The homeless individual forgave the young man. The kid apologized profusely. They continued to talk and shook hands. It was a learning lesson.

As for Jones, he admitted that he yelled "Wake up" to a homeless man sleeping in a doorway after leaving a downtown nightclub early last Wednesday. Jones, through his attorney, also said he tripped over Daniel Kellerher's leg and might have nudged him but denied stepping on him intentionally. Police said Kellerher sustained a minor injury that did not require medical attention. Jones, 21, pleaded not guilty to harassment. His next court date is Sept. 6.

No doubt the press, and the public, will crucify Jones. But waving a judgmental finger at Jones will do nothing to address the roots of homelessness and violence on the streets.

If all that happens in this situation is that a young man's career is tarnished and a homeless person is the victim of an unnecessary act, then ultimately nothing changes. Practicing non-violence takes effort and discipline. It's not just something that happens without teachable moments, especially for young men in America.

These unfortunate circumstances are not only a teachable moment for Jones, but also for the general public. It's an opportunity for anyone who may have similar kinds of impulses to pause and think twice before harassing a homeless person, or anyone else for that matter.

Homelessness is a traumatic experience that leaves people vulnerable to violence, sickness and even death. Getting harassed or possibly assaulted while sleeping is something that no one should have to endure.



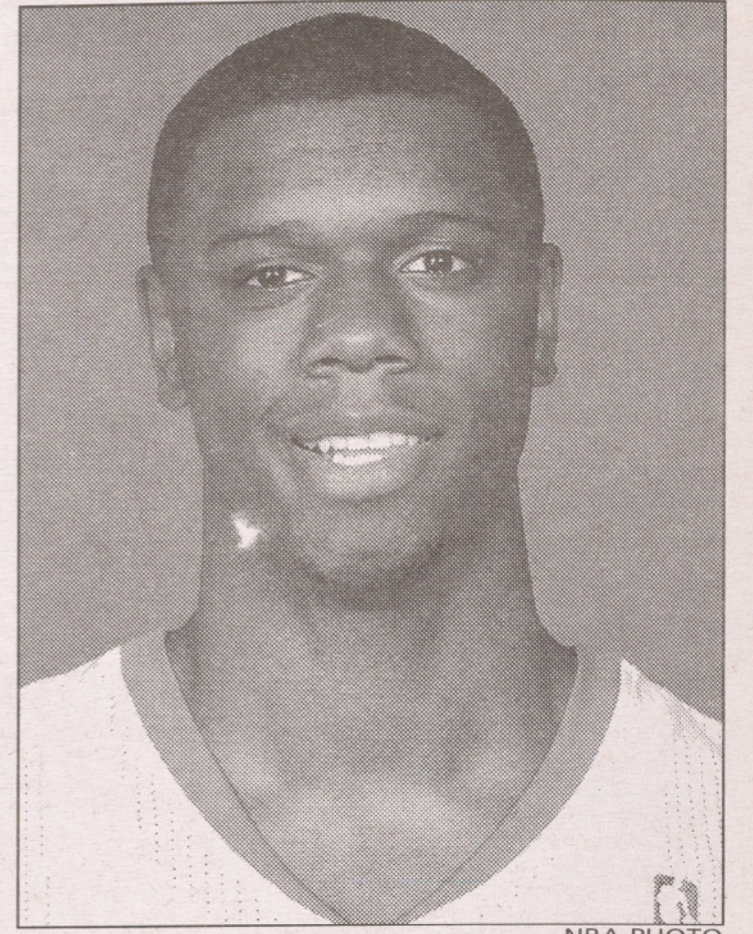
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DIRECTOR'S
DESK

By Israel Bayer

WHAT DO
YOU THINK?

Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mail to joanne@streetroots.org.



NBA PHOTO

Terrence Jones

"I didn't do nothing," Kellerher told television station KGW on Thursday. "I was laying there sleeping. It was a shock, you know? Something like an electric fence went through me at that point in time.

"You know it don't feel good. It's hard. I just want to cry. It's just hard to talk about because it hurts. I didn't think anybody would ever do that."

I don't know Terrence Jones, but I do know the streets. I know that the NBA cares about the poor and I also know what basketball means for people on the streets. Many people without a home look to their local basketball team as a vehicle of hope. There's not a day that passes during the regular season that people on the streets of Portland are not talking about the Trail Blazers.

Basketball transcends cultural and class lines and brings us together. We collectively root for our favorite players and teams, regardless of our economic circumstances. We rise and fall together as communities and sports fans, from the homeless man or woman sleeping in a doorway listening to the game on a wind-up radio to the family enjoying the action courtside.

Jones, the 18th pick in the 2012 NBA draft, can still have a long and fruitful career. I would love to see Portland, Houston and other NBA cities cheering for him instead of rooting against him. This is an opportunity for Jones to stand up and be a responsible person. It's a chance for him to educate himself on homelessness in his hometown of Portland and in Houston, where he'll face mounting scrutiny.

It's a chance for all of us to stand up and say that harassing homeless people is wrong. Homelessness and violence should never be accepted in our communities. Everyone deserves a safe place to call home.

Editors note: This column was originally published online at Sports Illustrated.

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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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 guides, call 503-228-5657. Resources are also available online at 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¢

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