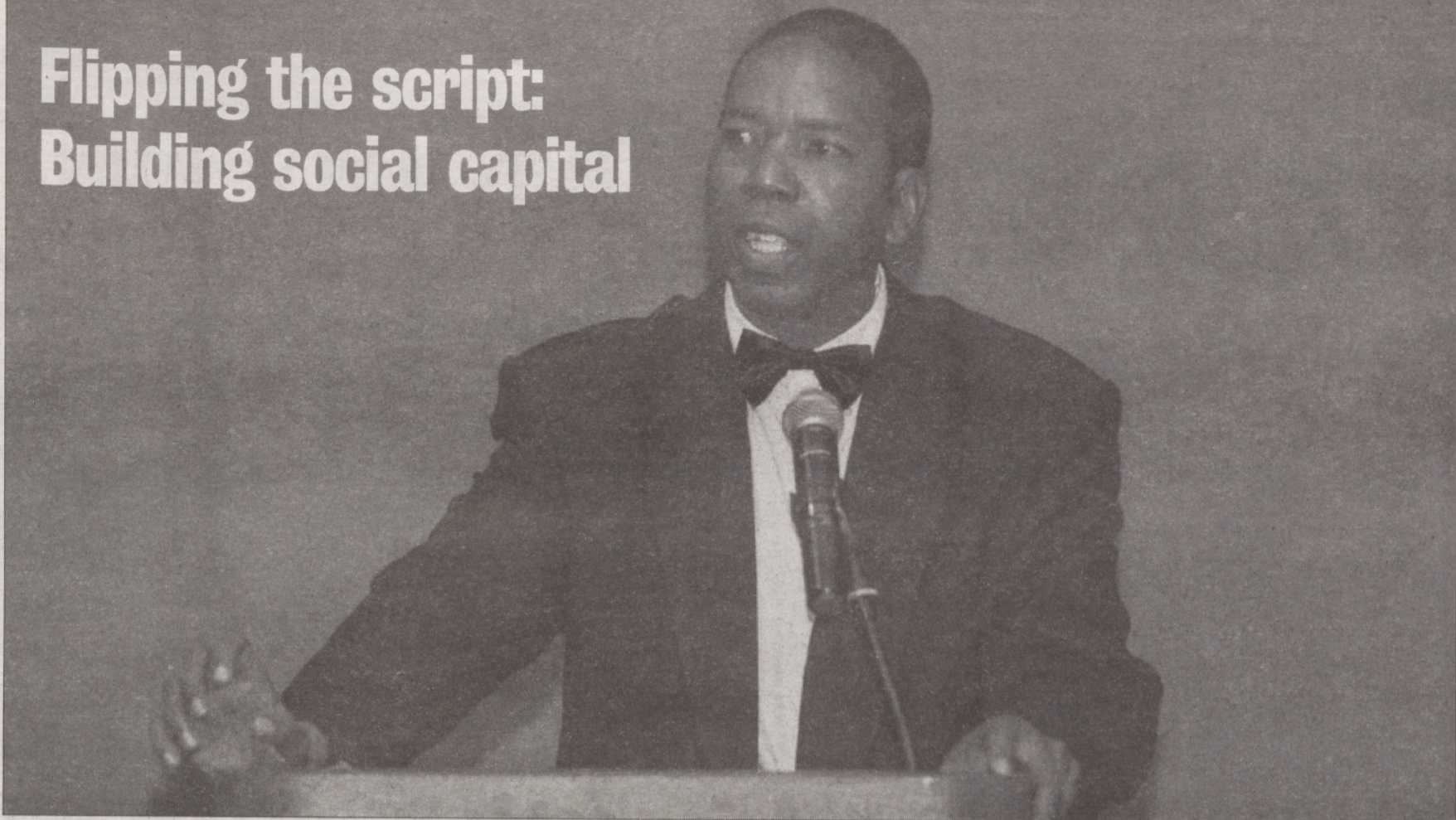


## Flipping the script: Building social capital



Vendor Marlon Crump delivers a speech in front of more than 200 Street Roots supporters at the Street Roots Family Breakfast after receiving the 2014 Vendor of the Year award.

PHOTOS BY DIEGO DIAZ

BY SARAH HANSELL  
STAFF WRITER

When Marlon Crump is standing on his turf in front of the Standard Insurance building on SW 4th and Salmon with a stack of Street Roots in his hands, even on a week in between new papers, it seems like everyone knows who he is.

Maybe it's his contagious enthusiasm. When I tell him his story is going in next week, he bursts into excited laughter and gives me a hug. Maybe it's his pride in what he does. He never wants to stop working for Street Roots. Maybe his suit and tie — which he's never missing — help. Whatever it is, on

his turf, he's a community figure.

The staff in Eistein Bros, where he stops for a cup of water before starting, know his

name. His regulars, whom he prefers to call supporters rather than customers, wave or stop to shake his hand as they pass by. A jogger shouts that he'll be out of town for a few weeks, just to let Marlon know.

This week is different than other weeks. Marlon just won the Street Roots Vendor of the Year Award, the highest honor Street Roots bestows upon their vendors. Marlon delivered a speech at the breakfast, in front of more than 200 people, that was more than inspiring.

After the award ceremony, Marlon hands copies of the award to several of the supporters who greet him at his turf, the people who stood by his side all along. Nancy Hales, wife of Mayor Charlie Hales, comes by to congratulate him and buy a paper. So do the Gefrohs, the parents of the late Street Roots vendor Nicholas Gefroh, to whom Marlon dedicated his poem, "Repping with the 'Roots.'"

Marlon has been with Street Roots since August 2011. He came from San Francisco, where he did activism work and community-based journalism. He has a natural gift for writing, and learned from his own experiences of privilege and power, especially the police brutality incident he survived 10 years ago.

Marlon came to Portland planning on joining Street Roots, a publication he says, "flips the script" of mainstream media, as a

vendor. He's been with the paper ever since, now living indoors after spending several months on the streets.

*Sarah Hansell: What's the biggest way Street Roots has impacted your life?*

**Marlon Crump:** So many words to describe. I would just say in a very magnificent and monumental way.

*S.H.: What specifically do you think that it's changed since coming to Portland, working at Street Roots?*

**M.C.:** Well to me, Street Roots put me in touch with so many community members. It's not just for me making a living, but just for the fact that I'm able to meet and greet so many people. I've been with Street Roots the past three years. I've built very solid community relationship with people, unlike I'd ever anticipated.

*S.H.: When you were standing in front of the crowd at the Street Roots annual breakfast about to give your Vendor of the Year award speech, what was going through your mind?*

**M.C.:** Being acknowledged for being a very important member of our community is amazing. The turnout was far more than I expected. I expected a lot of people to come, but the turnout was like, wow. It went beyond words.

*S.H.: In your speech you talked about your customers a little bit. How do your customers inspire you?*

**M.C.:** Well, I want to say for the record, I prefer to call them supporters. They inspire me. They pretty much keep me going. They basically have completed me as a person. From the time I started at Street Roots, the acceptance level was just more than I expected. To be accepted, and to have people turn around and tell me I inspire them somehow is special. There were people there at the Street Roots Family Breakfast that I have a very close relationship with, kind of like almost on a personal level, that I'm really like family to them now.

*S.H.: What do you think about your approach to being a vendor has gotten you such positive reactions from people?*

**M.C.:** Street Roots has so many readers and so many supporters. That's one of the reasons they have a consistent community, because we're always there with the latest news. I feel it's only fair if customers are buying a paper and contributing; they should know the news. They have just been so wonderful and loving. I try to devote as much time as possible when I'm out there, because they can really feel my energy and I can feel theirs. They have really allowed me to have a significant positive impact in their lives for the better.

*S.H.: What would you say that Street Roots means to you?*

**M.C.:** It means the world to me. The breakfast itself, it was a moment where my whole spiritual being was totally completed. You could just feel the awesome energy in the room. I mean, people clapping. The moment I got on the podium I felt that thunderous ovation. I mean just, like, wow. I don't think anything could be a substitute for that very moment. Being up on that stage, on that podium speaking, to get that positive reaction, it was almost like you're flying. It's been the greatest moment of my life, and I'll always hold that close in my heart.

*S.H.: When you found out you were going to be Vendor of the Year, what was your reaction?*

**M.C.:** (laughter) Well, if I knew anything about acrobatics, I'd probably be doing all kinds of somersaults and backflips. When Cole called me I wanted to scream at the top of my lungs, but I did not want to disturb my neighbors.

**"The moment I got on that podium I felt the thunderous ovation. I mean just, like, wow. I don't think anything could be a substitute for that very moment."**

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