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VENDOR PROFILE

Ron Britt

BY SAM BOUMAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Sitting outside the Street Roots office in his wheelchair on a blustery afternoon, Ron Britt smiles placidly in the spitting rain. He talks matter-of-factly about his life and his time selling the paper, with his tanned, tattooed hands crossed in his lap. He calmly ignores the rumble of passing beer trucks, a gaggle of tourists across the street, and the misty rain that comes and goes. When a shirtless man comes around the corner, screaming incoherent obscenities at nobody in particular, Ron shakes his head.

"There's no sense in talking that way," he says. "Just because you're sick doesn't mean you have to be bitter."

He has an air of guarded concern for the younger generation of homeless people in Portland. At one point during our interview, he quickly took a phone call from somebody he was helping navigate the intimidating transitional housing process, and he spoke often about helping his brother through a difficult period of mental illness.

Ron moved to Portland in 1963 from the Haight-Ashbury area of San Francisco and, aside from several years in Texas and California, he has been based in Portland ever since. He was in California most recently when his mother died, and he brought his younger brother here to help him deal with that trauma, an experience that along with Ron's many years on the streets has given him a deep understanding of the mental health issues faced by homeless people,

particularly in Portland, and the successes and failings of the various institutions set up to help them.

Ron was on the streets on and off for 33 years, beginning when he was 14 and ran away from home. At 17, he started using heroin and tried for years to kick the habit.

"Programs never worked for me," he says, explaining that it was only methadone that helped him quit. He was one of the first patients treated at an Oregon methadone clinic after the controversial programs began in the late 1960s. Nevertheless, he spent many years "slippin' and slidin'" in and out of addiction to various drugs until three years ago. He now lives in drug-free housing and credits his faith in God and busy free time selling Street Roots for his ability to maintain a clean life.

"If it wasn't for the Lord

above, I'd probably still be lost," Ron says. "I found him and accepted him into my life when I was about 33 years old, and it's been an uphill battle. I'm still slippin' and slidin', but at least I'm not slippin' and slidin' with the drugs."

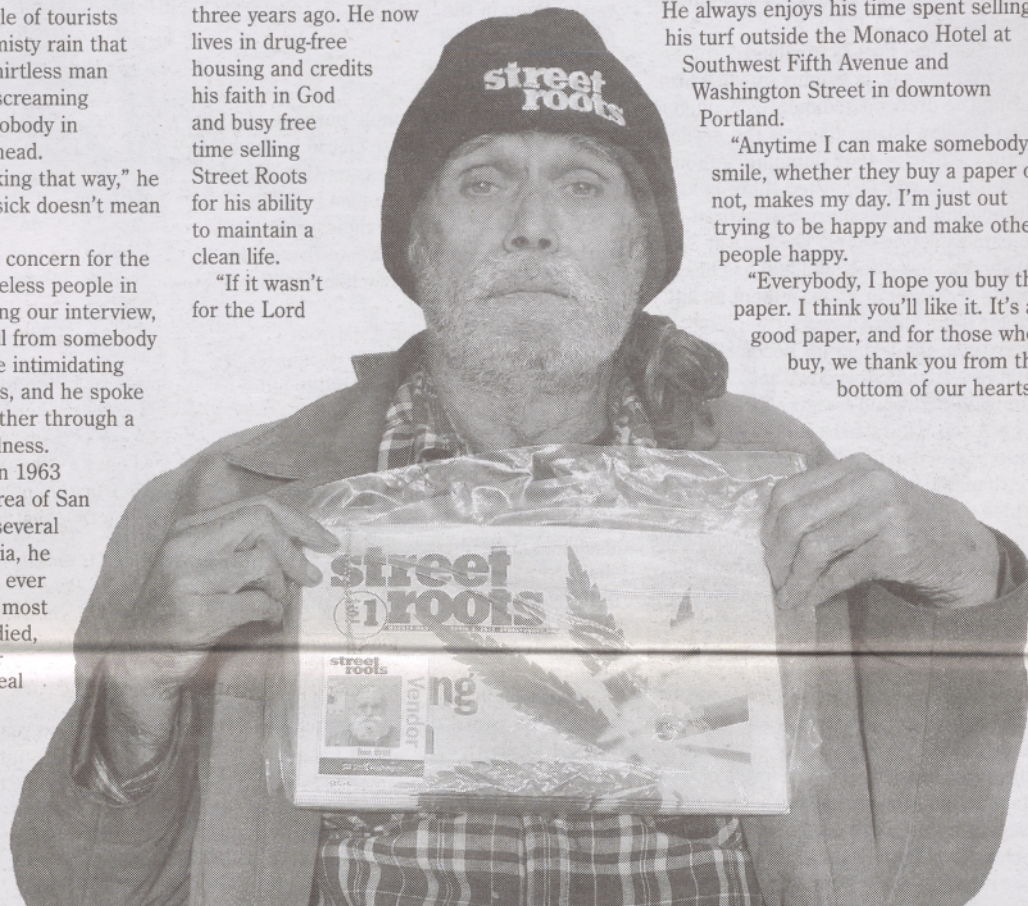
He is very grateful for Street Roots, which has given him a supplemental income so that he can reliably buy groceries.

"It's a good thing, man. Street Roots has helped a lot of homeless people. And it's helped me to stay clean. It gave me something to do in my spare time, so that I'm out there selling papers instead of chasing a bag."

He always enjoys his time spent selling at his turf outside the Monaco Hotel at Southwest Fifth Avenue and Washington Street in downtown Portland.

"Anytime I can make somebody smile, whether they buy a paper or not, makes my day. I'm just out trying to be happy and make other people happy.

"Everybody, I hope you buy the paper. I think you'll like it. It's a good paper, and for those who buy, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts."



Answers to puzzles on page 15

7	6	1	5	2	4	8	3	9
8	5	4	3	9	1	6	7	2
9	3	2	6	7	8	4	5	1
1	7	3	8	6	5	2	9	4
4	2	6	1	3	9	7	8	5
5	9	8	2	4	7	3	1	6
6	8	9	7	1	2	5	4	3
3	4	7	9	5	6	1	2	8
2	1	5	4	8	3	9	6	7

P	Y	X	R	E	S	T	Z	O	O	S			
I	L	O	E	R	I	E	E	T	H	L			
H	I	D	E	N	I	G	M	A	T	I	C	A	L
W	O	O	D	P	I	L	E	B	I	R	E	M	E
S	T	O	I	C	D	A	M	O	S	E	L	S	
S	U	R	L	Y	R	E	C	A	P	L	O	T	
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R	E	N	O	I	C	E	D						
S	A	T	O	R	I	G	E	N	O	T	A	P	H
M	I	S	B	E	L	I	E	V	E	R	P	E	T
A	R	E	N	T	E	X	A	C	T	S	E	A	
R	A	N	I	L	E	N	S						

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W	N	Y	L	B	E	N	N	E	T	O	R	I	S	
A	H	U	K	M	U	S	K	S	Y	V	E	K	P	M
T	Y	G	E	U	M	O	A	I	B	E	R	I	S	E
A	C	I	R	E	C	H	O	S	I	X	D	A		
R	D	I	H	C	B	O	Y	N	L	N	O	V	L	
U	G	I	L	L	O	O	A	M	O	I	O	I	T	
M	O	A	T	M	B	S	D	O	R	A	B	E		
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L	I	N	T	B	T	R	H	G	M	A	I	D	A	C
L	I	U	T	O	R	E	P	M	I	R	N	P	L	O
Y	T	O	R	V	P	O	R	E	N	M	R			
N	S	E	O	L	A	S	L	S	N	E	V	A		
J	A	R	U	M	S	E	A	D	E	S	E	R	H	K



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