

Of image and art

Seattle-based architect, photo-journalist and community activist Rex Hohlbein built his nonprofit, Facing Homelessness, on the back of a Facebook page called Homeless in Seattle. The page shares true stories of homelessness.

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Rex Hohlbein built a nonprofit on the back of a simple Facebook page on homelessness called “Homeless in Seattle.” Hohlbein’s more than 16,000 followers see beautiful black-and-white portraits of homeless people or someone working around homelessness with a small story or an inspirational quote.

Sometimes the posts include a request. On April 24, Homeless in Seattle posted that a friend of the organization, Joseph, had found work in Alaska and needed a good hiking backpack for his journey that would begin in June. Within a couple weeks, several people had dropped off backpacks.

Social media has a reputation for distraction and noise, but on Homeless in Seattle, Hohlbein’s enthusiasm and emotion bleeds through every word. In response to the donations, Hohlbein shared his signature “wowWOW” response, with an all-caps emphasis fitting for the man’s bottomless well of energy.

“You must already know this, but it bears repeating,” he wrote in response. “That all of you in the Homeless in Seattle community are changing lives through your unconditional LOVE, each time you touch someone struggling on the street you give HOPE.”

Hohlbein started as an architect designing million-dollar buildings for wealthy clients. After forming several friendships with homeless people outside

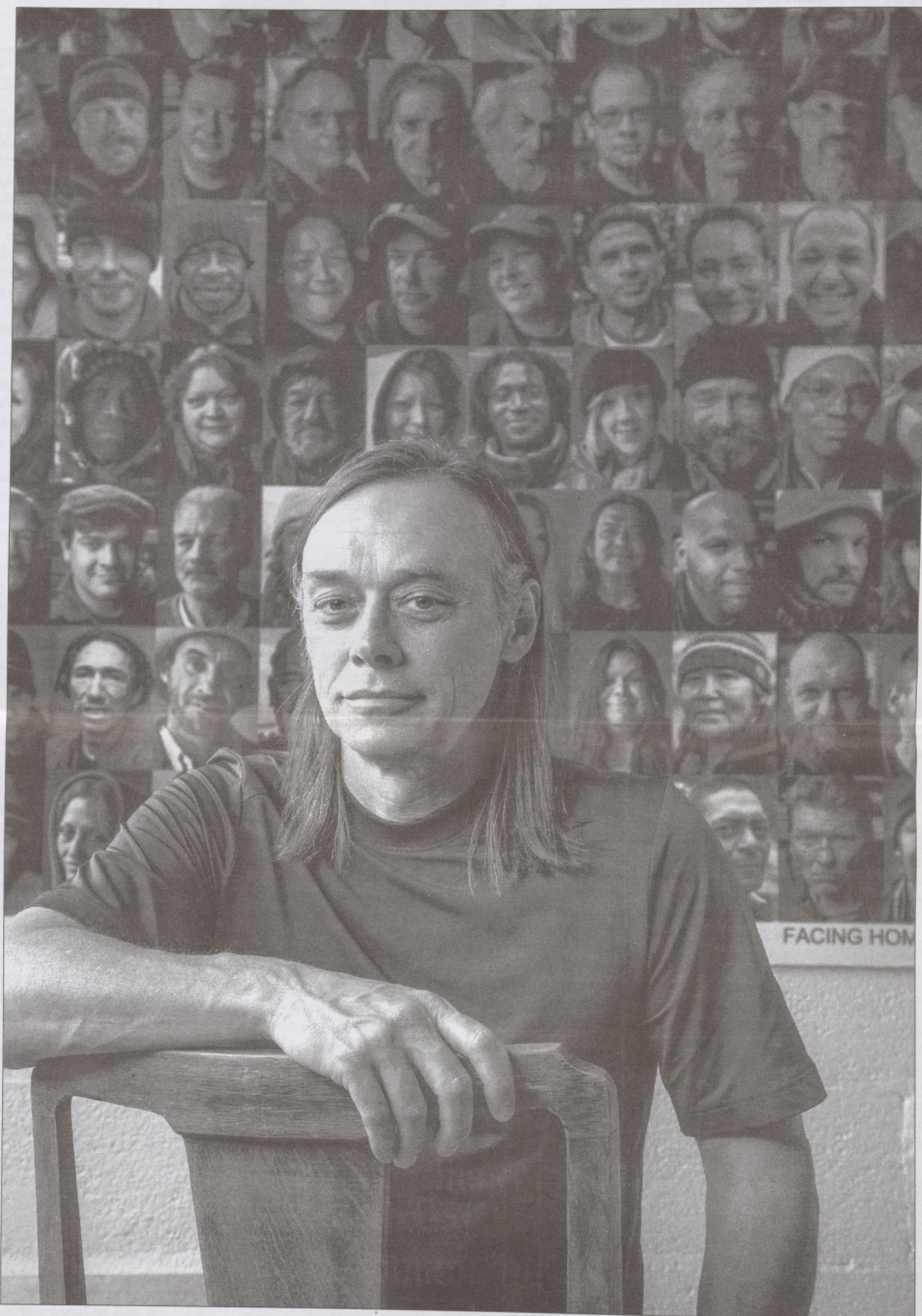


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“Being able to go in knowing that people love you and see you has a profound effect on the success of people navigating the available systems, and that’s borne out a little bit by the statistics that say the longer you are in homelessness, the more difficult it is to get out. That’s why it’s critical that the minute someone slips into homelessness to quickly get them back into housing, get them the services needed before their self-esteem is absolutely destroyed, quite honestly.”

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