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space, making an income for himself. Gardner plans to schedule performances every day of the week except Sunday. "That's homework time," Gardner said, laughing. "Kids don't need to be out here on a Sunday."

Gardner is at Ankeny Square every day; he feels a fierce ownership over the space. "I'm the face of the community," he said. "When someone's dog poops, I'm the one who walks over and asks them to pick it up."

He looks over at the food carts. "I don't want them to do anything but cook," he said. "I want the artists to do their art."

During a break between music sets, two men can be heard shouting at each other and walking down the median on Burnside. Gardner follows them, intending to break the argument up, but the men separate before he catches up to them.

A couple of hours later, two men get into an argument about a pipe and how much it costs. Gardner defuses the encounter. One of the men offers him a Negra Modelo, and he turns it down.

"I know I have to re-educate the community," he said. "That's not what this space is being used for anymore. It is a proactive and positive space."

He hopes that in a few years, no one associates Ankeny Square with its seedy past.

"Hopefully, people think of this as the community," he said. "My job is to change a lot of those perspectives."

During the performance, a man with a severely hunched back was balled up on the ground, as if he had fallen over. Gardner walked over to check on him.

"I have a certain way of being in this community, and it includes helping someone, it includes asking someone if they're all right," Gardner said. "I'm not burying my head in my phone or acting like someone else will get it or acting like it's not my problem. That's where a lot of our communities are headed these days."



Johnny Helmka performs bluegrass at Ankeny Square in Portland.

PHOTO BY AMANDA WALDROUPE

Gardner first heard the word "grubbin'" during a Thanksgiving meal more than a decade ago. His eyes shine when he tells the story. The food and the company was so good that a friend said, "Ah, man, this is grubbin'."

"Grubbin' became a feeling," Gardner said - that feeling a person gets when they're hanging out with friends or family, enjoying a meal together, connecting, creating a community together.

Gardner grew up in Brooklyn, on Ocean Avenue in the Flatbush neighborhood, which was predominantly Jamaican, Puerto Rican and Dominican.

"It was rough," he said. "I came through the whole crack epidemic."

He witnessed a murder when he was 9 years old. At that point, he learned he had to be mean.

"I knew where I was headed - I would be dead or in jail by the time I was 18," he said. "I was a statistic. That was my fate, my only chance of a destiny that I could have.

GET INVOLVED

If you're a performer interested in performing at Ankeny Square, Jamal Gardner can be contacted at grubbinpdx@gmail.com.

Anything else was unheard of, unrealistic."

He adopted the attitude of the streets, which he now describes as greedy. "It allows you to justify any goddamned thing you want. It's full of scapegoats."

He dealt drugs and moved to Portland in the mid-1990s to be closer to his mother and three siblings.

And then, he did go to prison - but it was well after his 18th birthday, for charges related to domestic violence toward his then-fiancée.

He served a 10-year sentence at the Columbia River Correctional Institution, a minimal-security prison in Portland.

Gardner, a musician who raps and writes rhythm and blues "like it's going out of style," became a fervent participant in a group called Arts in Prison. He said it helped him learn how to be vulnerable. He also took business and entrepreneurship classes and began to formulate plans for Grubbin' before his release Dec. 4, 2015.

Gardner cried like he'd won the lottery when the parks bureau told him his proposal had been accepted. He was walking across the Morrison Bridge when he got the call. He was told during an interview with finalists that the bureau would notify him with a decision within two days. But it had been two weeks. He didn't think he had gotten it.

He said the parks employee told him: We wanted to just congratulate you and let you know that you got it.

"I just started screaming in the middle of the bridge," Gardner said. He thinks he cried for nearly half an hour.

After Irving performed, a solo guitarist performed a set of folk rock songs.

Then a 20-something young man got on the stage with an acoustic guitar. He was a bluegrass singer, but you wouldn't guess it by looking at him - he was wearing baggy jean shorts, a large red t-shirt and a blue bandana on his head. He closed his eyes and hollered into the microphone, singing about heartbreak and love. Anyone listening could close their eyes and be in a 1950s-era Texas honky-tonk bar.

The next act was a friend of Gardner's, who DJs '90s pop and rock power ballads. Michael Jackson. Whitney Houston. People danced as they walked by.

A homeless woman in a wheelchair danced in her seat to every song, each musician throughout the afternoon. Gardner walked up to her and introduced himself.

"I've inspired her to get her life in order," Gardner said, smiling. "All I did was me. I didn't do anything special."

Ankeny Square's new mission is already working.

people's FOOD CO-OP

FARMERS' MARKET WEDNESDAYS 2-7PM

UP TO \$10 MATCH WITH EBT CARD

We're passionate about helping our community access healthy food that they can trust. By shopping at our market, you'll get extra food dollars while supporting local farmers and community.

3029 SE 21st Ave. btwn Powell & Division

Did you serve in the **Armed Forces** and are experiencing or at risk of becoming homeless?

Transition Projects

Please call 855.425.5544 or visit 650 NW Irving Street