

# From Portland to Montreal; a vendor-to-vendor chat

This week, street papers around the world celebrate Vendor Week. Recently John Brown, a Street Roots vendor, had the opportunity to interview a vendor in another country. Here is his conversation with James, a vendor at L'itinéraire, a street magazine in Montréal, Canada.

**James:** L'itinéraire is a magazine that is published twice a month. It helps the vendors and the homeless to reintegrate into society. It also serves to educate and create awareness about homelessness among Montréal's population, as well as other realities in the world. Other topics are covered such as social and cultural issues. Vendors buy the magazine \$1.50 and sell it on the street for \$3.

Fifty percent of our publication is written by the vendors. As for me, this is the first time that I have conducted an interview. I have been a vendor for about 10 years now, but I never really got involved with the magazine. I am glad to get involved and be able to talk with vendors, not only from Montréal, but from elsewhere in the world.

**John:** Street Roots is a 16-page newspaper, including news, ads, artistic items such as poems. Our editorial line is pretty progressive. But some of our vendors don't always agree with it. We have a super team in our newsroom.

Two years ago, we decided to make Street Roots a weekly paper. It's been great for sales. A new paper every Friday and that works



Street Roots vendor John Brown (right) Skypes with James, a vendor in Montréal, Canada.

really well! We also have a guide that informs people about organizations that help people. Where you can go to eat, where you can find shelter. It has a lot of success. We buy the paper for 25 cents and sell it for a dollar, so we make 75 cents per transaction. I sell about 150 to 200 papers a week, and thank goodness. I'm able to rent a house from what I earn. I am very grateful.

**James:** What is it like to be homeless in Portland?

**John:** Usually, the weather isn't too bad. It's not that cold, but it does rain from October to June. There are a lot of homeless people in Portland, and I am pleased to no longer be one of them.

**James:** I traveled to Vancouver and there's a lot of rain there. But it's not as cold as it is here, but it is difficult to manage living on the street. I am currently homeless, and it's hard. Luckily, I've got two excellent sleeping bags, and once I get inside, it's fine. The worst part is having to get out of them in

the morning.

**John:** In Portland, we don't have enough places with temporary beds. The places where you can go and spend the night are not very good, but in the middle of winter, it's better than sleeping in the doorway of a store. We have Social Security, a few social programs and subsidized housing. I know a lot of people who live in them for very reasonable prices. But there is more demand than there is availability. You can certainly be on a waiting list for years.

**James:** I heard about Dignity Village in Portland. Is it a place where you can build a shack?

**John:** It's like a tent community. But I compare it to the favelas in Brazil. I don't know how many generations of poor people live there. Dignity Village has been around for 15 or 20 years.

**James:** Here, I don't know of any such place. There are rooms, though, where you pay between \$400 and \$500 a month. However, we have welfare. That's about \$600 a month. That helps to pay for a room.

**John:** Are there good social services available in Canada?

**James:** Yes, social services are good here, but sometimes getting them takes awhile. I

See VENDOR CHAT, page 14

## New street paper hits the press in Colorado Springs

BY LAURA KELLY  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Two years ago, Raven Canon was newly homeless in Colorado Springs, a city on the eastern edge of the southern Rocky Mountains. She was sitting outside the city's Penrose library, and she was hungry.

"I'm female, so I was just trying to keep a low profile," she recalled. "People target you, especially if you're female and homeless."

Raven's caution was well-founded, but meant she was unaware that help was close at hand. "I didn't know the soup kitchen was a block and a half away – and I was starving," she said. "When I found out, I was just appalled that I could sit a block and a half away and not know that was there."

This moment of need, and the desire to stop anyone else from facing the same situation, was the spur for Raven to launch Colorado Springs' first street paper. As a former vendor for Real Change, she recalled how the Seattle street paper had printed a calendar to inform homeless people of the services available to them.

"For me, putting the calendar on the very back page of the paper – that was the catalyst that started it all," she said.

Shortly afterward, the City Council passed a no-sit, no-lye ordinance (which prohibits sitting or lying on the sidewalk or in other public spaces) and Raven was more

convinced than ever that the homeless community needed a voice.

"The idea came from being hungry – the desire came from wanting to fight," she explained. "I'm forced to step up into this role that I've created. It's bizarre, because until I did this we (the homeless community) had no voice here, none. The city council, the CSPD (Colorado Springs Police Department), the mayor – they walked all over us. I just got tired of it. I started stomping my feet."

So for the past year and a half, with support from fellow members of the street paper community, including Real Change, the Denver Voice and Nashville paper The Contributor, Raven has been working to make The Springs Echo a reality. She secured backing from local activist group Coalition for Compassion and Action (CCA) – for whom Raven was their first homeless member – and from the NAACP. Like the founders of many fledgling papers before her, she also pulled in favors from friends and fellow activists.

The first edition of the paper was printed at the start of 2017. Three thousand copies were delivered to the very soup kitchen that had been so tantalizingly out of reach for Raven just a couple of years earlier. In the last couple of weeks, 10 vendors have been through the orientation process. They buy the paper for 50 cents and sell it for a recommended donation of \$1.50.



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On the first day The Springs Echo hit the streets, Raven heard that a high-ranking member of the mayor's office had bought a copy. "So I'd say the chances are pretty high that the mayor's read it. And for me that's just such a personal accomplishment. The fact that the very first edition out, the very first day that I launched, someone from the mayor's office made a point to buy it, tells me that there is a market for this. This is so workable," she said.

Creating a new street paper is always a

herculean task but Raven's story is all the more remarkable because she achieved it while facing her own struggles with homelessness. Without permanent shelter, she juggles fundraising and editing duties while staying at friends' houses or sleeping in a local 24-hour café.

"It's a battle," she admitted. "At times, it's more than I can bear. I can't go into a regular shelter setting, where I normally used to go, because I pretty much go around with a big bullseye on my back in the homeless community right now. I'm bringing unwanted attention on them. They don't understand that things are getting better because I'm doing this. They're so used to people abusing them and throwing them under the bus, that is what they naturally expect. Until more members of the homeless community start to stand up with me, my voice has to be the loudest. Because right now, there's no balance to the conversation."

Activism is at the heart of Raven's ambitions for the paper – but given her continuing struggle with housing, the financial imperative that drives street papers is never far from her mind. "For me, this is all about the vendors," she said. "If the vendors aren't out there making money, what's the point? We need a voice, but at the end of the day this is about getting people off the streets."

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