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VENDOR PROFILE

Ben Eiland

BY LENORA KO
STAFF WRITER

Ben Eiland is a personable, hardworking man who says he is healing one day at a time. He grew up in both Buena Vista and Leadville, Colo., after his parents divorced when he was 7.

"I come from a good family," Ben said. "I'm just very fortunate and blessed with my mom and my stepdad and my dad.

His father gave him the skills to live in the forest.

"My dad's a world-renowned firearms expert," Ben said. "I got my first rifle when I was 3 days old. Not 3 years old; 3 *days* old. By the time I was 10, I had a collection that was the envy of all the grown men in town. My dad taught me how to hunt, fish, trap and live off the land. And up where I'm from, a lot of people are like that."

His stepfather gave him a solid work ethic.

"I even got a good stepdad out of the deal. He was the one I started working for when I was 14 – carrying hod. Being a hod carrier is where you carry big buckets of mud for stucco. It's very, very brutal, hard work. We worked sunup to sundown, six days a week, sometimes seven. He taught me well."

In his 20s and 30s, Ben would often spend summers camping in the forest while working in construction. He graduated from carrying stucco mud to building concrete foundations and then got into framing houses.

When his church needed to mount a steeple onto the roof, Ben made it happen.

"I had to cut four by fours and drill holes,

so I could bolt it up through the trusses," Ben said. "The way they built (the steeple), the pitch was wrong. So I had to cut the pitch right to fit the roof and flash it in."

To lift the steeple to the roof, Ben used his ingenuity and friends who ran a crane at a business next door to the church.

"I've known these guys since I was 5 years old," Ben said. "Chris kicks up the crane, we go over there, strap up the steeple, and it was up in no time.

"I had an extraordinarily good reputation for my work. People back home have been hiring me all my life. My work is all over Buena Vista, Salida, Leadville, Fairplay and Alma."

It was a shock to his family and friends when Ben abruptly left.

"Six months ago, I had a construction business," he said. "I had a wife and two kids – her two kids. I raised them for seven years. She didn't want to be faithful and ruined it. I just had to run. I left everything I owned."

"I just

loaded up a little backpack with my Bible and another coat. I got on a bus to Portland because that's how much bus money I had."

Devastated and homeless for the first time in his life, he fell into a deep depression. He had hoped the big city would offer more job opportunities, but has found it rough going.

Ben is getting back on his feet and making new friends in Portland, many of them through Street Roots. Two Street Roots vendors bought a Santa hat for him to wear before Christmas and help him sell papers. Ben is now paying it forward by coaching other vendors on how to sell papers.

Best of all, Ben met a Street Roots customer, who is also a carpenter. The customer has become a friend who has hired Ben to work together on some handyman jobs.

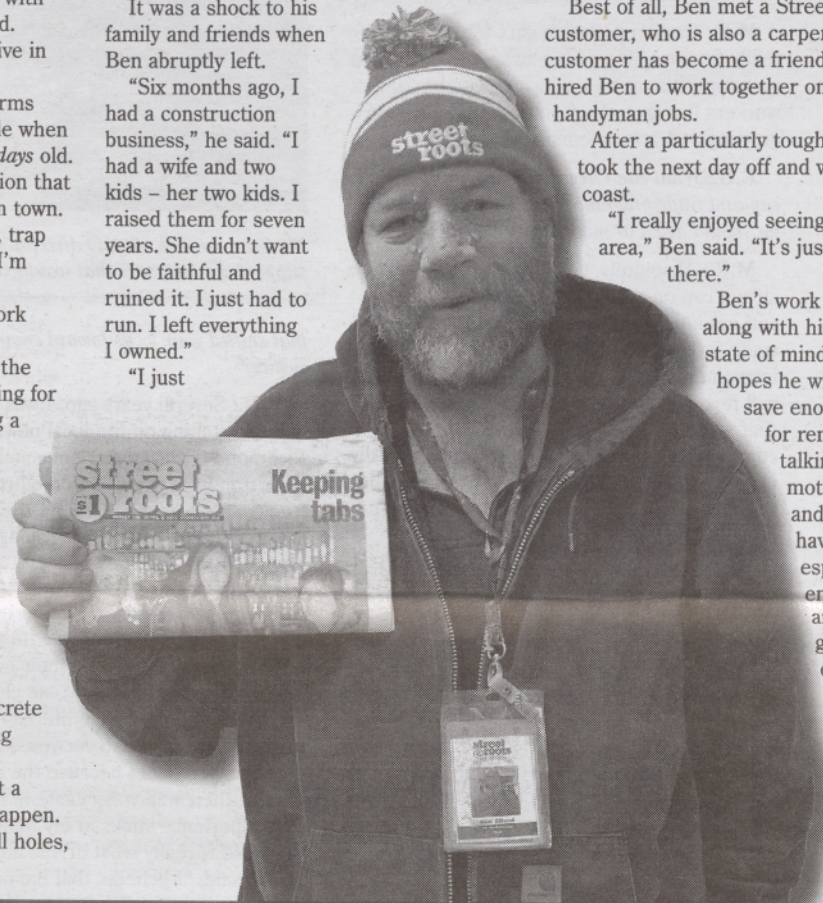
After a particularly tough job, they took the next day off and went to the coast.

"I really enjoyed seeing a whole new area," Ben said. "It's just beautiful out there."

Ben's work has increased along with his improved state of mind, and he hopes he will be able to save enough money for rent. He says

talking with his mother, sister and best friend have been especially encouraging and he is getting back on track.

"They're good at helping me," Ben said. "One day at a time."



Answers to Page 15 Puzzles

S	M	S	P	O	S	R	O	O	S	R	E	S	R	E	S	P	H	O	S
R	I	L	E	R	O	L	O	S	T	E	L	M	S	T	E	L	M	S	T
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T	R	E	F	A	M	O	N	K	T	R	E	F	A	M	O	N	K	T	R
G	A	M	E	T	E	S	N	A	R	L	U	P	G	A	M	E	T	E	S
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7	5	9	2	8	4	3	6	1
3	6	8	9	5	1	4	7	2
1	4	2	7	3	6	9	8	5
9	1	5	3	6	2	8	4	7
8	7	3	5	4	9	1	2	6
6	2	4	1	7	8	5	3	9

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