

Street Roots' Israel Bayer to step down

I almost can't believe I'm writing these words, but I'm announcing that I'll be departing Street Roots at the end of this year.

I've lived and breathed Street Roots and homeless advocacy for the past 15 years of my life. I'll be taking six months off to write a book and to take a breather before deciding what's next in my life.

Concerning Street Roots, the organization has never been in a better place.

Under the leadership of Executive Editor Joanne Zuhl, the newspaper is thriving and will continue to do so.

The organization itself is in the best financial standing it has ever been. We have a great team of dedicated staff, a strong board of directors and an amazing readership that will lead Street Roots into the next era.

Street Roots is currently working with our board of directors on a transition plan.

How do I give context to the past 15 years at Street Roots?

It's hard to describe. I'm letting go of something I've loved with all of my heart for most of my adult life. My love

for Street Roots, the neighborhood I've worked in for years and the city I live in is bigger than anything I could describe.

First and foremost, the hundreds upon hundreds of hours I've spent with people on the streets has been by far the most rewarding. It's also been the most heartbreaking.

Being able to take part in seeing so many people rise above the trauma of homelessness and go on to do great things is inspiring.

Witnessing the power of the human spirit when faced with some of the harshest living conditions in the modern world is both daunting and hopeful. It's the reason that regardless of any of the hardships we face at Street Roots, we always remain optimistic.

I've also witnessed more people die on the streets than I can count. Their ghosts haunt me at times. I will also have a place in my heart for those who didn't make it out of the hell that is homelessness.

What I'm most proud of is that together, as a team, we have inserted ourselves into the local media landscape, while becoming a fixture of hope and dignity for both people on the streets and readers alike.

Street Roots has become an award-winning weekly publication, helping change the face of homelessness in Portland. I'd argue pound for pound we are one of the best street newspapers in the world and one of the best newspapers in the Pacific Northwest.

Street Roots has worked with Multnomah County and the medical examiner's office to create an annual count of people who have died on the streets. We helped deliver Portland's first affordable housing public ballot initiative. We continue to fight for the civil

rights of people on the streets. We've helped maintain housing for hundreds of individuals and families. The list goes on.

Street Roots isn't afraid to think big, to plan thoughtfully and to execute. That couldn't be done without the amazing team we have at Street Roots.

Personally, I've always tried to lead the organization in a way that wasn't geared toward doing the popular thing, but the right thing – for both the organization and people on the streets.

It has meant giving my blood, sweat and tears, while also experiencing some of the most traumatic and joyful times of my life.

It has not always been easy to navigate the small world of Portland politics. It has meant speaking truth to power and trying – to the best of my ability – to always think about moving the issue of homelessness forward, regardless of the consequences. I've always tried to do so with integrity, sometimes getting it right and sometimes not.

When I first started at Street Roots, there was a World War II vet named George who was sleeping on the streets near the office. I'd always go and talk with him about everything from life to Street Roots to times long gone.

The most important advice he gave me when I was starting was that there are going to be times in this job when it feels like the whole world is bearing down

on you – simply breathe and think about who you're here to serve. "It's the people," he would say. "If that's the only thing you accomplish, then you've done your job."

George has long since passed on, but I still think of him and those words, especially today as I write this column and reflect. I hope it's the people that I've ultimately served.

Honestly, there are so many mentors and friends I'd like to thank for helping me along my journey at Street Roots. When I took over Street Roots I had no nonprofit training or political lens through which to look at the world. I owe my gratitude to the help of many friends and Street Roots supporters. I love and appreciate all of you dearly, wherever we might find ourselves on the long road.

Lastly, over the next six months I will be working with the organization to make sure that Street Roots remains strong and vibrant throughout the transition.

Ultimately, from a reader's perspective, you're not going to see much of a change. The organization will march on through the good times and bad, just like it always has.

The reality is Street Roots is so much bigger than any one person.

I can't say how thankful I am to have been able to take part of leading this organization and being a part of such a beautiful story. Let's continue to make it so.

Big love!



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

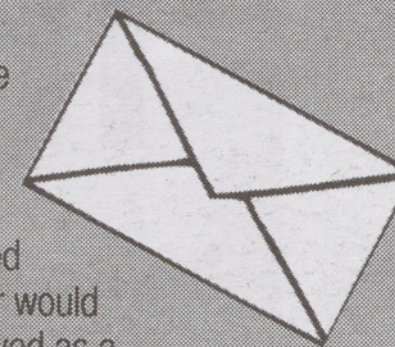
Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.



Clockwise from left: Israel Bayer, Vendor Marlon Crump, Street Roots supporter Art Garcia, and Migo.

Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Executive Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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