

HYGIENE, from page 7

property, that contains two shower stalls. The center began offering showers a year ago, and Mason hopes to start offering the service again to the center's clientele in the coming weeks.

Fifteen minutes of hot water and a private shower makes a huge difference in clients' lives, Mason said.

"Looking at the look on clients' faces was amazing," she said. "Saying it was a blessed outlook is not overstating it. We knew it was going to make people feel good."

Ronni Gilboa, the general manager of Seattle's Urban Rest Stop, does not mince words when she speaks of the importance of hygiene to homeless people.

"We are keeping people alive, safe, clean and healthy," she said.

The Low Income Housing Institute opened its first Urban Rest Stop in Seattle in 1999. Today, there are three such hygiene centers offering showers, laundry services and bathrooms.

Gilboa estimates that since opening, Urban Rest Stops have served more than 100,000 people. Each year, the program serves between 5,500 and 6,500 people. Half of those people, Gilboa said, are clients who had never used Urban Rest Stop's services before.

Each client is allowed a 15-minute shower in a stall also containing a toilet, a sink and a place to safely store possessions.

After each use, the stalls and bathrooms are cleaned with bleach and water, and the air is cleaned with an electrostatic purifier.

The cleaning measures are cheap and necessary, Gilboa said.

"We're dealing with people who live outside," she said. "Their immune systems are compromised. They're under stress, not

eating well, not sleeping well. God knows what kind of contaminants they're picking up."

Once someone has taken a shower and used Urban Rest Stop's other services, Gilboa said, it's hard to tell if they're homeless.

"They're not unlike anybody else in town with a backpack, and there are a lot of people who have backpacks and rain jackets in Seattle," she said.

Urban Rest Stop does not operate any mobile shower units, but Gilboa said it is something the agency is thinking of adding.

Mason said the Clackamas Service Center is considering taking its shower cart to remote locations such as camps, but there are logistical challenges, such as limited water and time.

The Village Coalition, which builds and supports tiny-house villages, is working with a private philanthropist to build a solar-powered tiny

house, on a trailer, that contains a shower and a washer and dryer. The coalition was instrumental in starting Portland's newest homeless village, the new Kenton Women's Village in the Kenton neighborhood.

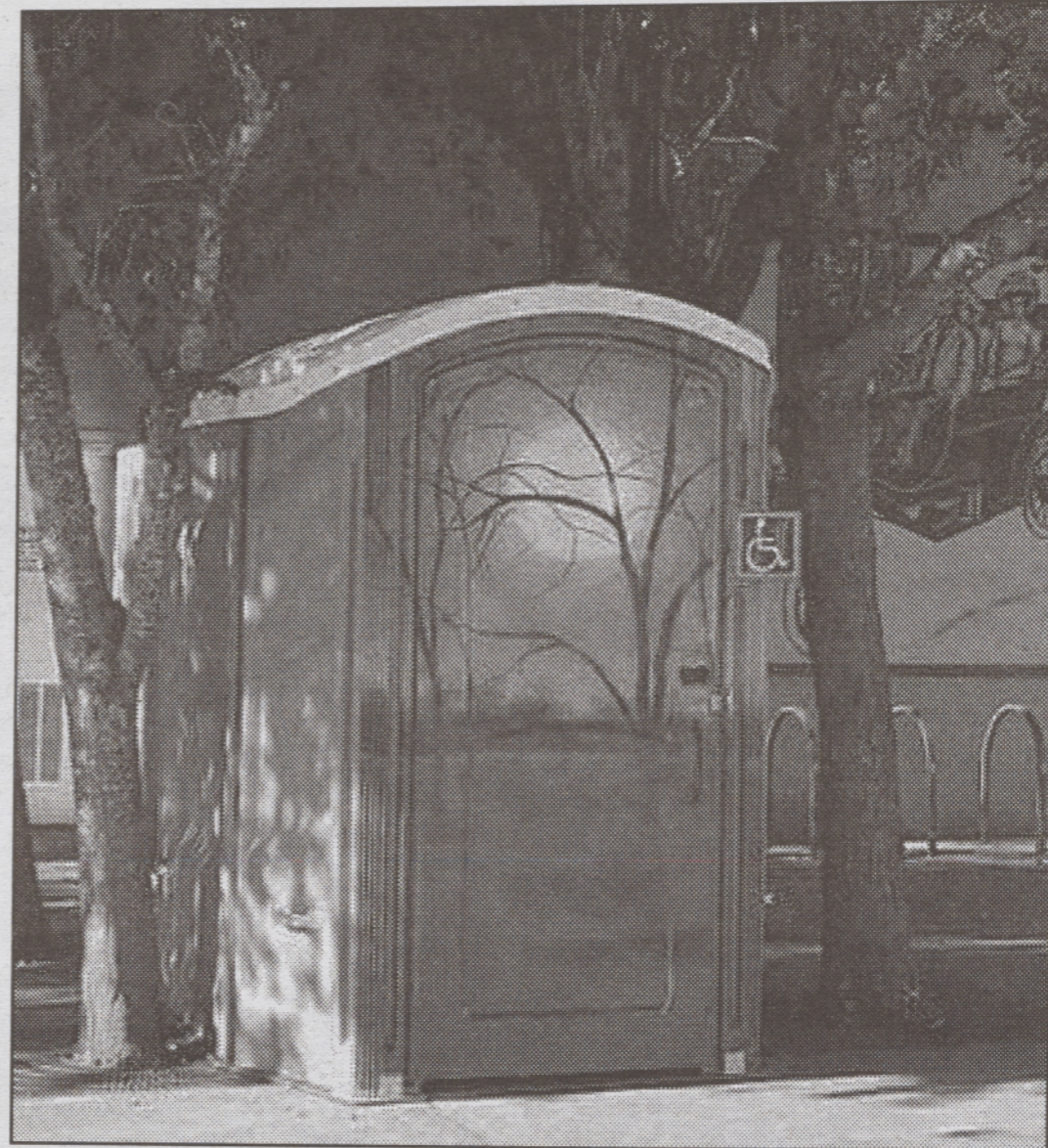
Bikman said the hygiene trailer can be built for less than \$8,000, and the first one will be used at Right 2 Dream Too, a homeless village in inner Northeast Portland, in the coming weeks.

"Increasing access to hygiene is changing the public's perception of what houseless people are capable of and how they should be cared for and empowered to care for themselves," he said.

This past year, San Diego suffered a deadly outbreak of Hepatitis A, notably among the homeless population, illustrating the extreme consequences of not providing hygiene services.

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DAVID BIKMAN,
STEERING COMMITTEE CHAIR,
VILLAGE COALITION



Public "Arta Potties" in Oregon City are painted over with scenes of the city's history.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARTA POTTIES

The outbreak of the potentially fatal disease, which attacks the liver, began in November 2016 and has resulted in the deaths of 17 people and the hospitalization of more than 400, the large majority of them homeless. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said earlier this year that the outbreak represented the most deaths of any outbreak in the United States in the past 20 years.

Hepatitis A is spread through water and food contaminated by human feces. It is easily preventable and "closely associated with unsafe water or food, inadequate sanitation and poor personal hygiene," according to the World Health Organization.

San Diego declared a public health emergency in September and has begun power-washing sidewalks with bleach and water, as well as opening public restrooms and hand washing stations. Police are also sweeping parts of downtown where nearly 1,000 homeless people have camped.

Gilboa could hardly contain her "nausea and anger" when she learned of the

outbreak, not only because the outbreak was easily preventable but also because of the cost of hospitalizations and other responses. "You could have built a chain of Urban Rest Stops," she said.

Whether an Urban Rest Stop-style hygiene center will be built in Portland remains to be seen. The main recommendation of the PSU survey is to build a hygiene center open seven days a week for at least 12 to 14 hours, providing showers, bathrooms, laundry facilities, and storage or locker space.

Lisa Hawash, the Portland State University professor who spearheaded the hygiene survey, said she is developing a business plan for a hygiene center in the Portland area.

"There is a sense of urgency with thoughtfulness," she said.

"We have a civic responsibility to take care of people ... to sustain people, (so they can) get into housing," Gilboa said. "End of discussion."

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