

These are the times to cherish life, respect survival

It has been a hard week at Street Roots. A handful of our vendors witnessed the police shooting Saturday night at City Team Ministries. People struggling with homelessness, and the trauma inherent in that existence, now have to contend with this memory of a person gunned down in their proximity.



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Kaia Sand

Kaia Sand is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach her at kaia@streetroots.org. Follow her on Twitter @mkaiasand

Throughout the week, Street Roots vendors came into our space recounting a terrifying scene. Some had gathered Saturday night for the AA meeting; some to get some rest. They describe how a clearly disturbed man burst into

the space, police lights flashing from the street. All those who had sought City Team as refuge desperately fled out the exit door, pushing each other to safety.

One man's glasses were broken in the crash of bodies getting to safety, and he wandered to Street Roots barely able to see. As we helped him sort out that repair (his glasses are now in good shape) others gathered to talk and share pizza. They were alone in the terror of it, and sought a bit of community.

"There were a whole lot of victims there that night other than that [alleged] carjacker and his family," one Street Roots vendor told me. "This took a piece of our serenity."

The Street Roots vendors who were present describe sleeping on a bus that night, and eventually, Imago Dei, a shelter that opened temporarily while City Team was shut down. Now each person deals with the brutal aftermath crushing down on their mental health while they face the daily struggle of being homeless,

including where to sleep each night. Some have returned to City Team, some to other shelters, some now back on the street.

One of our vendors described feeling alone in the terrifying aftermath: "Nobody cared about the homeless victims," he said. "Here's one more thing for your crappy life. You are so used to being in the rain, you can deal with this."

There's a lot to think about, including the desperate ongoing need for de-escalation when people are in crisis. But here's something for us all to grapple with: Each person who was homeless before that shooting was homeless after that shooting, now with one more layer of trauma. While they deal with sleep deprivation, self-care can feel as far away as the stars.

I send out love and admiration to our Street Roots vendors, staff and volunteers, steadfast in their kindness; and to the staff at City Team Shelter, who worked hard to re-open the shelter quickly; and to all the others in our community who have helped, including the Trauma Intervention Program who came to support our vendors. Thank you.

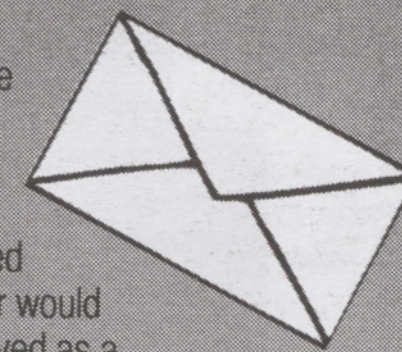
I wanted to write about the news around the Harbor of Hope navigation center planned for under the Broadway Bridge, but this week, the space of grief is a gulf. I will dig into that soon because we must dream and plan and design.

This week, let's remember just how hard it is day in, day out, for people who are homeless in our community.

Please keep showing our Street Roots vendors kindness and community support. When you walk by people in desperate conditions on the sidewalk, please remember that for many folks who struggle through the crush of traumas, survival is a feat. Let us as a community cherish each of their lives.

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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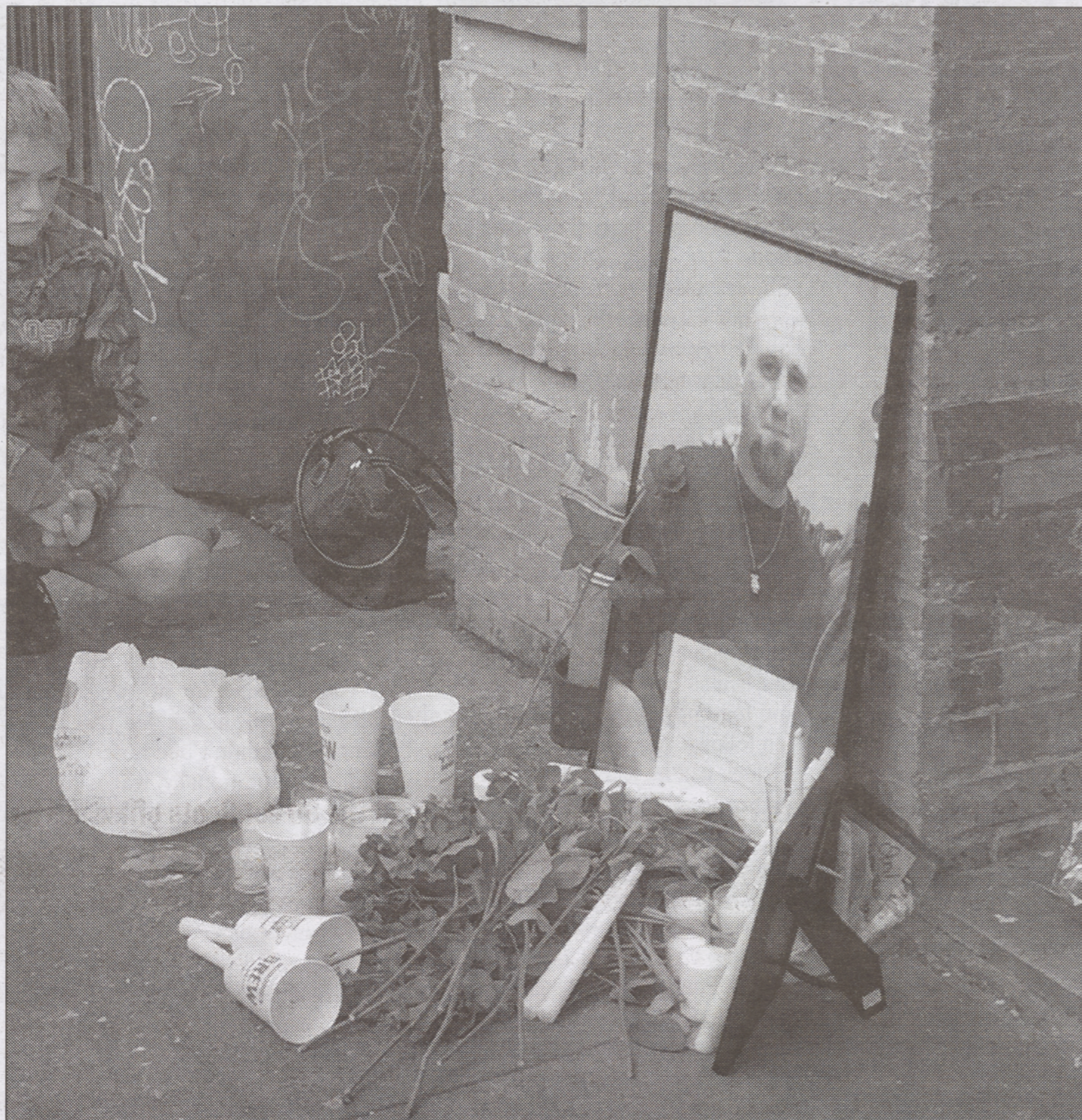
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Soon after the April 7 shooting at the City Team Ministries shelter, a memorial was set up outside to remember the victim, John Elifritz. Elifritz was shot and killed by police after he burst into a shelter meeting wielding a knife.

PHOTO BY KAIA SAND