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## VENDOR PROFILE

### Netty Johnson

BY LEONORA KO  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When Netty Johnson did a good deed and helped a stranger in Portland, a chain of events led to a long friendship and eventually to Street Roots.

It started when an elderly woman fell trying to catch the bus.

"Back 30, 40 years ago, I was a nurse's aide," said Netty, "so I was able to pick her up."

Netty stayed with the woman until the ambulance arrived and thought no more about it. A few months later, a bouquet of flowers arrived at her workplace with a message: "My name is Margaret and you helped me. You saved me a lot of damage, and I'd like to take you to lunch one day."

Eventually the two women became friends. Netty did odd jobs around Margaret's house and Margaret, a retired literature professor from Evergreen College, taught Netty to read.

At that point Netty was one year into her recovery from drug addiction.

Netty said she had a challenging childhood growing up in Seattle and was the 10th of 11 children raised by a single mother.

"We never did the foster system in my family," said Netty. "My mother was never on welfare, food stamps or nothing.

She made us work. She taught us what she could and gave us all wisdom. But as I experience mental health treatment now, I realize I was born with some type of syndrome.

"Life started happening," she said. "I became pregnant. I was 16 and a half. He was 34.

He gave me heroin, cocaine." Her boyfriend was abusive and Netty left him and took their daughter. But she was not able to stay off drugs and her mother and two sisters ended up raising her child.

She said she went in and out of

prison and never received addiction treatment before arriving in Portland, where she was arrested for possession. "The judge, Sidney Galton, sent a psychiatrist with Multnomah County to talk to me. And he's the one who got me into De Paul (Treatment Center)."

"That's how I got treatment on Feb. 22, 2004. And I've been clean since," said Netty.

Because of her recovery work, Netty qualified for housing through REACH Community Development, a private nonprofit corporation that provides affordable housing. She also went through job training at Central City Concern, a nonprofit agency that provides services addressing homelessness, poverty and addiction.

She has worked as a dishwasher, counselor and welder and has been always eager to do a good job.

"It's just in my DNA to work," said Netty.

But finding jobs has been difficult. She said, "When I applied for a job as a dishwasher, it took the chef almost six long weeks to get me that job because I have a (prison) record that's 14 years old.

And I'm not even touching money. When you have a record, when does it come to the point that you say, 'She's worked long enough and didn't violate the laws?' By then my

mental health is too exhausted to get it." Netty was near the home of her friend Margaret when she met Earl, a Street Roots vendor. She happened to be between jobs, and he encouraged her to sell Street Roots.

She now sells Street Roots near New Seasons Market Woodstock and often brings her dog Sunny "just so he can socialize." Netty always brings her best self to the job and during this interview, she had a grey sweatshirt and hat specially made with the words "Street Roots" and made sure Sunny was presentable.

"Everybody knows Sunny because he's always with me. He's at the meetings. He's at church. He's everywhere," said Netty.

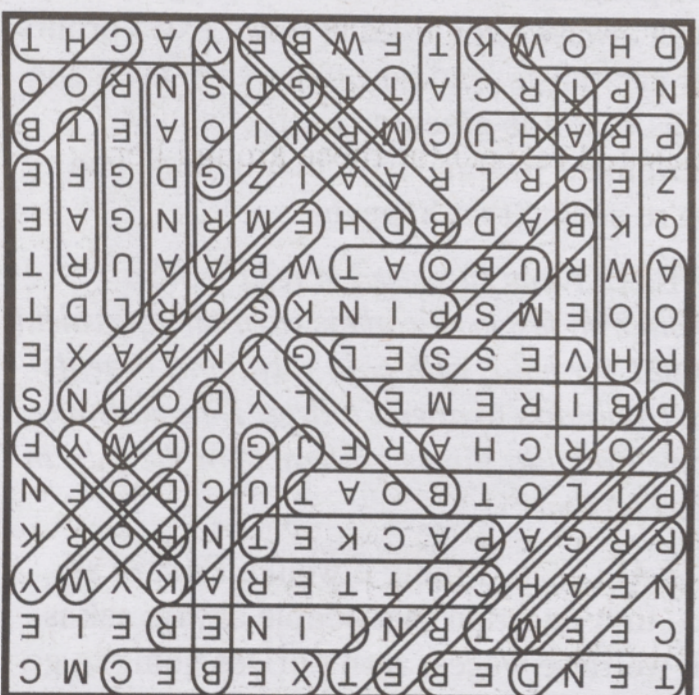
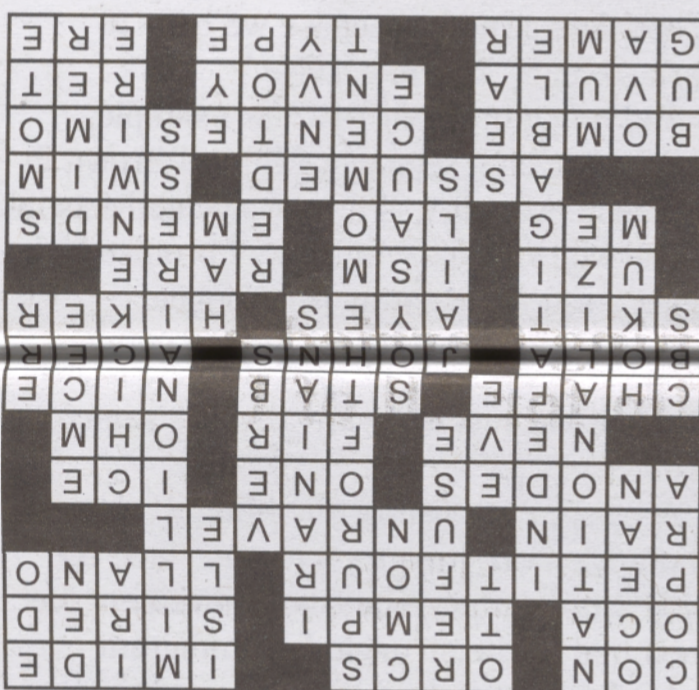
Recently, Netty had a reporting gig where she helped interview Black Lives Matter activist DeRay McKesson for Street Roots. A reader was so impressed with the interview that they sent a \$500 donation to Street Roots, to which Netty exclaimed, "Wow, that's cool!"

Netty described her experience selling Street Roots this way: "We get out there and smile with that paper, right? We might be mad at the whole world and haven't

seen our family in years, but we still try to dress nice. You know, put on something cute, make up our little outfits.

"Some (of the vendors) are not there yet. But they still have a reason to get up and go out in the public. From whatever they went through before they arrived here in the morning — they get their papers. They got something to hold onto that makes them feel human."

### Answers to Page 15 Puzzles



2	9	8	3	5	4	7	1	6
7	1	5	8	6	9	4	2	3
6	4	3	7	1	2	5	8	9
9	2	6	5	7	1	8	3	4
1	8	4	9	3	6	2	5	7
5	3	7	2	4	8	6	9	1
8	7	9	1	2	3	6	4	5
4	5	1	6	8	7	3	9	2
3	6	2	4	9	5	1	7	8



pō'et, any official poet of a  
 pō'et-ress, n. a poetess. [O]  
 pō'et-ry, n. [OFr. poëtrie; L.  
 poeta; poet.]  
 1. the writing of poems;  
 poems.  
 2. poems; poetical works.  
 3. something like poetry in  
 tional effect; as, that  
 met; poetic

**Celebrate National Poetry Month with Street Roots vendors and Multnomah County Library.**  
 Join us for a reading  
 April 29, 2-3:30 p.m.  
 at the Central Library,  
 801 SW 10th Avenue