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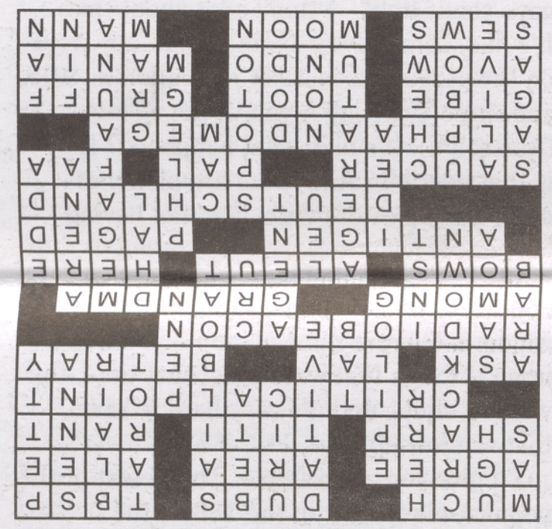
Answers to Page 15 Puzzles



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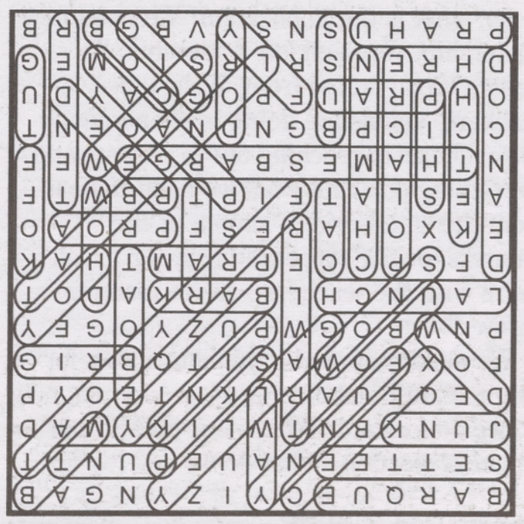


VENDOR PROFILE
Rich Pounds

HELEN HILL
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

"Every day I pray for wisdom, knowledge and understanding, so I can understand people and work to make them happy." These are words Rich Pounds lives by. He is a deeply spiritual man, and a man who loves to work, and lives to work.

Rich was born in Orange County, Calif. He grew up across the highway from Disneyland, with the sound of the surf from nearby Newport Beach. Rich's Navajo mother was unable to care for him, so he was raised by his grandmother. "My grandmother cleaned houses for a living, so I learned at an early age how to take care of things."

Rich was in and out of a boy's home throughout childhood.

"In the boy's home, there was one of every gang member from Compton, Watts, East LA. I was the minority. I had to learn to take care of myself," he said. "They took me on my own terms. I was big and tough, but I was scared inside just like any other kid."

As an adult, Rich lived on a Navajo Indian Reservation in New Mexico for nearly 10 years. He hauled water, chopped wood and walked miles every day to hitchhike out to a construction job. He still loves the Navajo way. "Everyone does what they have to for the betterment of all. There is no selfishness."

Rich had six children on the reservation. All are still living and working in the area.

Rich eventually moved to Montana and worked for many years at The Rex Restaurant in Billings. Built beside the railroad tracks in 1910, The Rex was a thriving hotel and restaurant that served as a meeting place for Old West characters such as Buffalo Bill and Calamity Jane. Rich did everything there, including maintenance, janitorial work and prep and cooking in the fine dining room. He is a skilled painter and carpenter by trade.

Last year, The Rex was sold, then closed down in a move that surprised everyone. Rich lost his job overnight, and then his house. During the cold Montana winter, he ended up at a Gospel mission. He couldn't find work in the Billings area, so he left for Portland in hopes of finding a job in the construction and painting trades.

"I keep trying to find a job. Everywhere I go you have to go through the process. They put so many people in front of you that don't have the right information," Rich said.

Rich's wallet and truck with his tools in it were stolen shortly after arriving in Portland. "I've been trying to stay above water," he said. "I've always had a truck, tools and a phone." Now he donates his time at Sisters of the Road so he can eat, and he's still looking for work.

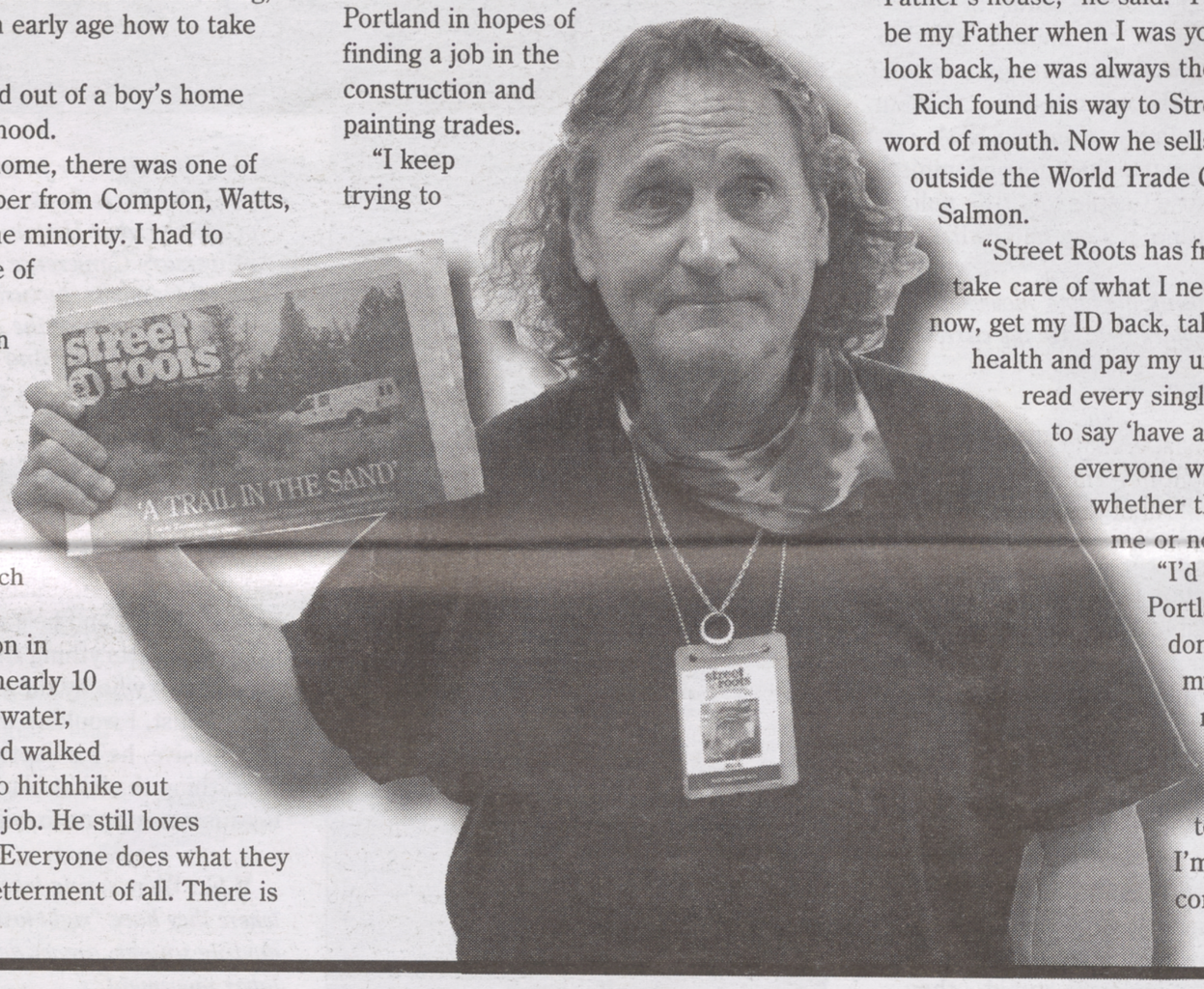
"I love working, I love being independent. Being homeless I don't enjoy," he said. "Once I get one hand up, I'll get it. My main goal is to make people happy. I need work to do that."

In the darkest times, Rich's spirituality sustains him. "Anytime there's a cross in the building, I'm not homeless. That's my Father's house," he said. "I asked God to be my Father when I was young, when I look back, he was always there."

Rich found his way to Street Roots by word of mouth. Now he sells downtown outside the World Trade Center, 121 SW Salmon.

"Street Roots has freed me up to take care of what I need to do for now, get my ID back, take care of my health and pay my union dues. I've read every single article. I like to say 'have a blessed day' to everyone who passes whether they buy from me or not."

"I'd like to give Portland a chance. I don't know where my Father wants me to be. There's a reason I had to come here, I'm taking it as it comes for now."



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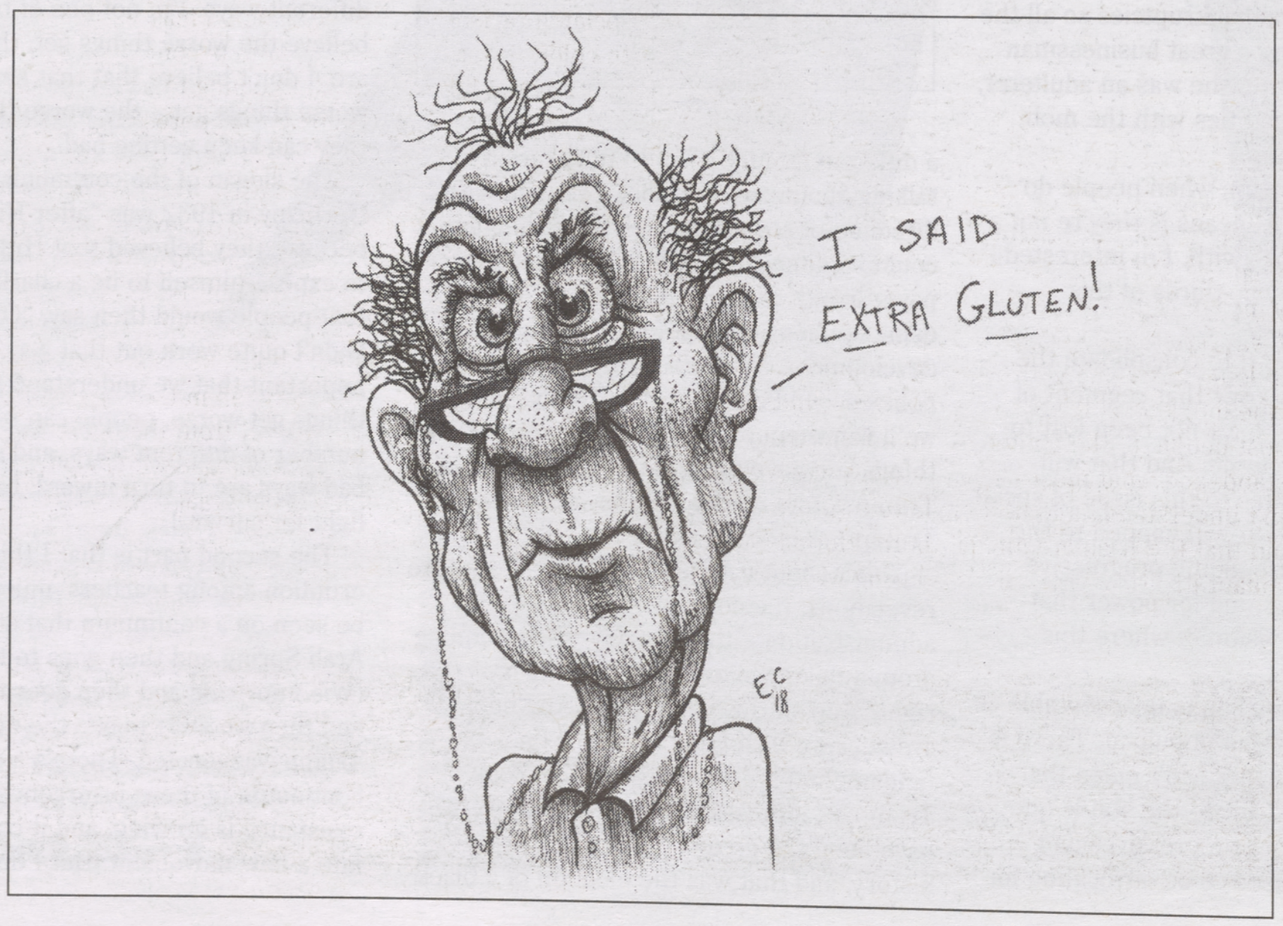
by Elizabeth Considine