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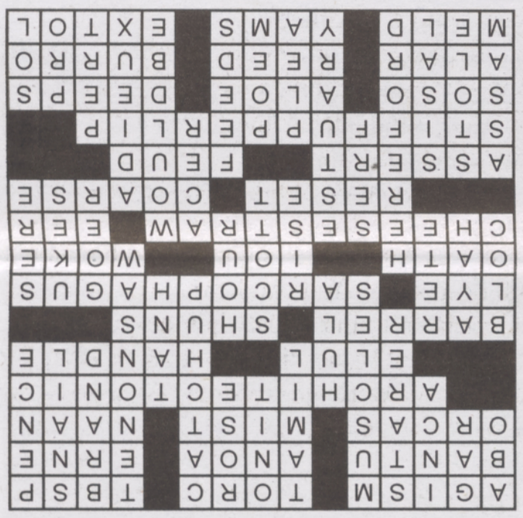
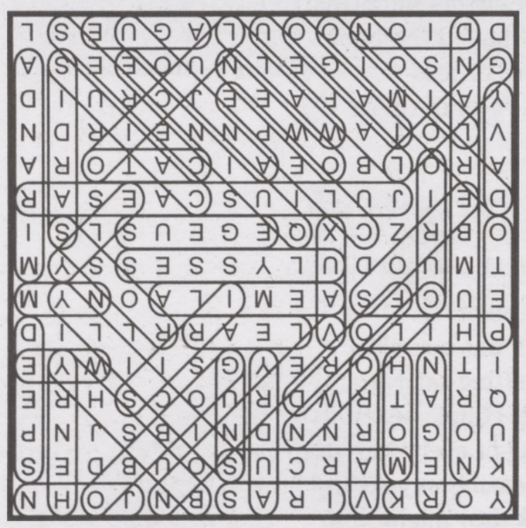
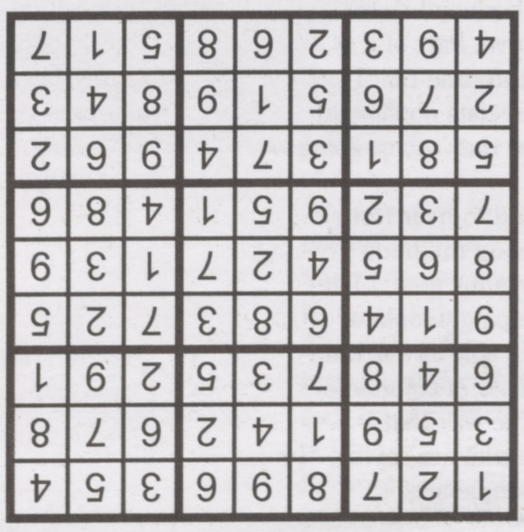
Answers to Page 15 Puzzles







Street Roots vendors stand with Occupy

"Best friends" are part of OccupyICEPDX protest

BY HELEN HILL
STAFF WRITER

On June 21, a Thursday evening, the Mexica Tiahui Aztec Dancers, in their tall, feather headdresses and colorful embroidered clothing had just finished performing for a cheering crowd.

Hundreds of protesters, supporters and families were standing outside the Portland U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement headquarters at 4310 SW Macadam Ave. when the roar of a speeding car with a pulled muffler interrupted the festivities.

A large Confederate flag billowed from the window and several men shouted out "white supremacy!" The car stopped and revved the engine menacingly in front of the crowd. The terror was tangible; cars have increasingly been weaponized in conflicts across the country. People acted quickly to move children and those in wheelchairs behind a human blockade. After a tense stand off, the car sped away.

Despite these isolated acts of terrorism, the occupation of the Portland ICE office was gaining momentum. In a decisive response to the Trump administration's separation of immigrant children and families, swelling numbers of Portland activists converged at the ICE facility with the intent to remain until it is permanently shut down. In addition to the round-the-clock protesters, hundreds of people have been dropping in for the vigils, speeches and performances. Supporters have brought food, money, tents, sleeping bags and kitchen supplies. Tribal members, musicians, pro bono lawyers and activists have created an impromptu working village with a welcoming booth, kitchen, medical tent, sanitary services, children's play area, and even a library.

Street Roots vendors Barbra Weber, Bryant King and Bob Dickey have been at the protest since Tuesday, June 19. Dickey is a veteran occupier who has protested at Standing Rock, Occupy Flint and many other sites. They describe themselves as best friends and in it for the long haul.

On Thursday, June 28, federal officers from the Department of Homeland Security cleared the camp from federal property, arresting some members of Occupy. As of press time, it was expected that the occupation would continue in some form.

On Thursday, June 21, Mexica Tiahui Aztec Dancers (left) performed outside of the Portland ICE office on Southwest Macadam Avenue. Among the protesters are Street Roots' vendors Barbra Weber (below left), Bob Dickey (below right) and Bryant King (not pictured).

PHOTOS BY HELEN HILL

Helen Hill: *So what's it like out there?*

Barbra Weber: This is my first occupation. It's disorganized but it comes together because it's a collective consciousness, people just step in whenever they can. You come across somebody struggling with something and you help them out. It's been like that the whole way. Now that we've been there a few days, people are breaking up into committees. These people are in the kitchen, these people are on finance, these people are on security. Me and the people I'm working with are on child care and accessibility to the camp. It's been an experience, nothing like I've ever been through before. I feel like we have the support of the whole city, except for some fringe people. Every five minutes someone comes by with a donation.

"This is my first occupation. It's disorganized but yet it comes together because it's a collective consciousness, people just step in whenever they can. You come across somebody struggling with something and you help them out. It's been like that the whole way. "

BARBRA WEBER
STREET ROOTS VENDOR

H.H.: *Why are you protesting?*

B.W.: We're talking about children locked up in cages, away from their family, with no human contact, or barely. We shouldn't do that to prisoners, why the hell are we doing that to kids?

Bryant King: I've got to stand my ground against injustice, and to me that's a damn injustice. What they are doing is unconstitutional.

H.H.: *What is the goal of the occupation?*

B.W.: To close down all the ICE facilities in sanctuary cities. If you're going to call yourself a sanctuary city, you shouldn't have ICE. We're trying to encourage other sanctuary cities. Once we get this shut down, we're going to Sheridan.

B.K.: And I want to take my two best friends here and go out and sell some Street Roots and pitch in. It might not be much, $5 or $10 between the three of us, but we can contribute.

H.H.: *How do you think the occupation is helping?*

B.D.: This is definitely doing what occupations do; they bring awareness to the problem. I've been willing to be a martyr for the cause for the past seven years.

B.W.: This is affecting what's going on in the rest of the United States. And this is what's really sad, and I've tied it in for the people at camp. We're talking about the immigrants who are locked in these facilities, but we're also talking about people of color and discrimination. I'm homeless, and most of my brothers and sisters on the streets are people of color. We get treated the same way. They take our kids, they give them to people (saying): "Oh, they'll have a better life with these people."

So when you're talking about robbing people of basic human dignity, we live that shit every day, and that's why we're taking a stand, it's because we do understand at a very deep level. We might not be locked into cages, but that sidewalk is a damn cage in this city.

On Wednesday I talked before at least three or four hundred people. I spoke about how homelessness comes together with this issue of basic human dignity. I spoke about people dying on the streets, how drug addiction and alcoholism are symptomatic; you keep getting hit, that's what happens. I got up there and I talked specifically about people of color, about sweeps, the basic things we go through; lack of restrooms, laundry, showers. How they take our kids.

Because of the stigma of homelessness, our families depart from us. It is nothing that we did, it's because we're homeless. They are embarrassed. That's why homeless people begin to build their own families. We get ripped down the middle.