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VENDOR PROFILE

Jay Juno

BY HELEN HILL
STAFF WRITER

Jay Juno's artistic skills have impressed everyone during Street Roots' recent open art sessions. He has effortlessly created beautiful chalkboard drawings, still-life paintings and graphic novel characters.

Jay was born and raised in Tennessee.

"Both my parents were good people," he said. "They were hippies.

"My father was out of place in Tennessee. He was a hard-core Democrat," Jay said.

"My mother was a stay-at-home mom, and I recently found out she painted and liked to write. It was hard to be a creative woman in Tennessee, Southern culture where women weren't supposed to do much. I was told she was discouraged from even getting a job."

Jay's mother died of cancer when he was 9.

"It destroyed my family. My dad was too depressed to do anything. He laid in bed a lot and died 10 years later, in the same month," he said.

Jay remembers visiting his mother in the hospital, seeing her with tubes sticking out of her.

"She was in pain a long time and didn't tell anybody," he said. After chemo and surgery, "she lost the will to live."

Jay identifies as a transgender man, but "growing up, I didn't know the term 'transgender,'" he said. "I started wearing boy's clothes in middle school. My dad was supportive, though he didn't know the term. He taught me how to tie a tie.

"I wanted to wear my hair short, but they

wouldn't let me. I would ask for colored pencils and art stuff, and they would buy me a purse or makeup kit, then get mad at me for not using it. The South was always behind the progress in the North. There is more racism and LGBT present, but people want you to keep it quiet," he said.

Jay attended Middle Tennessee State University after high school, the same university where his father was in charge of student housing. Jay's father died unexpectedly when he was in his first year of college.

"I became homeless when my dad died all of a sudden. I slept in my dad's car a few months, then I got a student grant to live in the dorms. It was hard on me when my dad died. He was my best friend. I miss him every day," he said.

Jay feels like time hasn't moved on since the shock of his father's death. He's been homeless off and on for the past three years. He is used to losing most of his art and

sketchbooks. Lately, though, he has been taking advantage of library services and scans his art, uploading the digital files to DeviantArt.com, under the name "J Juno." At this site, he safely stores the developing characters and concepts for his graphic novel.

Jay has experienced bullying and threats during his time on the streets.

"I've had a lot of speech therapy, but everyone makes fun of the way I talk. People call me

names because my voice is high-pitched," he said.

He lived in Denver for a time and sold papers for the Denver Voice, a street newspaper.

Jay arrived in Portland this year, encouraged by rumors of housing, which haven't panned out yet.

"It's not so bad since I came here. I stick to myself," he said. "But there is a problem with bullying in the shelters here, too."

Jay finds it challenging to work at his art and writing while being homeless.

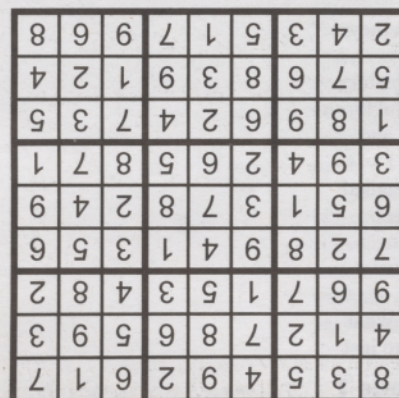
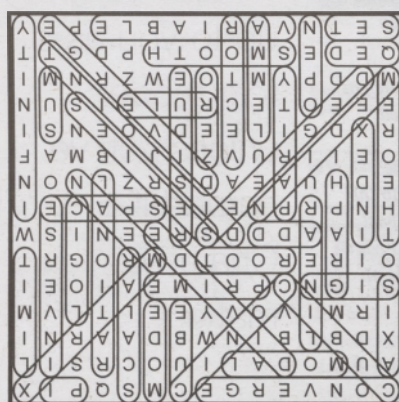
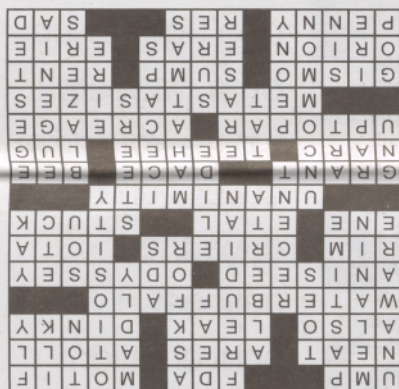
"Even when I find the space, I am so stressed out because I know it won't last," he said. "I want to work on the manuscripts for my stories, it's driving me crazy. I want my stories to do some good."

He said Street Roots "has given me a positive direction. I've fallen in love with Portland and with Street Roots. I still get depressed, but I want to keep exploring. I think I want to stick around."

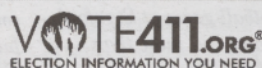
Jay sells Street Roots on weekends at the Tea Bar at 1055 NW Northrup and on weekdays outside Lovejoy Bakers at 989 NW 10th Ave.



Answers to Page 15 Puzzles



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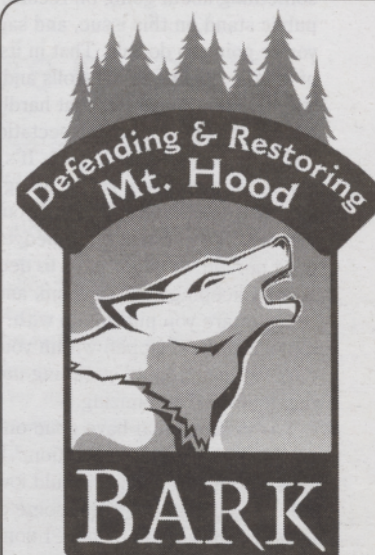
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