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VENDOR PROFILE

Jim McRae

BY HELEN HILL
STAFF WRITER

It is an honor to rise above ground, open my eyes, and take a fresh breath of air," said Jim McRae. These are the words he lives by.

Jim was born in White Plains, N.Y. He was an only child, and his father was a military man. As a communications officer, Jim's father was responsible for the health and welfare of many enlisted people. It was his job to ensure his team met standards of personal appearance and maintained equipment and property. Jim recalls his father carried those standards back home.

"I grew up in a military setting, I couldn't talk jive or slang. I had to make my bed just right. I thank my mom and dad for honor, pride, discipline, mannerisms and respect," he said.

Jim's family moved to Los Angeles when he was 5 years old, then later to McMinnville when his father got a job at Tektronix. "Imagine moving from Los Angeles to McMinnville," he said. "It was a shock."

Jim's home life changed at a crucial time when his father left the family when Jim was 17. He remembers looking to men on the street to learn about manhood. He received

a diploma from McMinnville High School in 1982, and then went into the Angell Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center near Yachats. He graduated in 1984, a union painter by trade.

"Job Corps taught me to stand up straight and square-shouldered," he said. Jim went on to work many challenging hard labor jobs. He worked at Oregon Steel Mills on the Columbia River, manufacturing sheet metal plating for the military. It was a dangerous job. "You could lose your whole hand when the plates were sheared. Then we loaded them onto flatbed rail cars and chained them down," he said.

Jim also worked for a time as a sawyer for a Lebanon saw mill loading planks on chains and standing clear. He also was a jogger in a local printer,

stacking and binding papers coming off the press. "You gotta move in that job, there's no being sleepy," he said. He also worked deconstruction in the construction industry. "I've been blue collar all my life," he said.

The love of Jim's life is his 89-year-old Irish-Italian mother Regina. She is wheelchair-bound in a care center in Newberg, Jim sees her when he can. "She is a dear sweet woman and I will never forget her," he said. She worked over 30 years in a care center as a restorative aid, helping clients keep moving, walking and staying flexible.

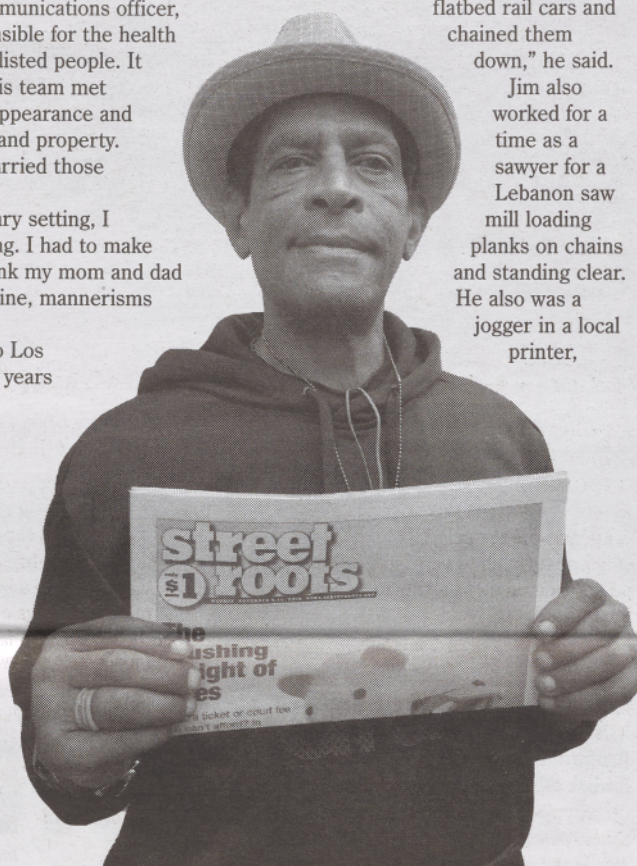
Jim dreams of taking his beloved mother back to White Plains so he can see where he was born. He would also like to take her to Italy, but he knows that's a long shot. "Maybe I will take her to Seattle for Christmas and show her the sights," he said. "She's my queen. Amore to my momma."

Jim has been a Street Roots vendor for the past two and a half years. "I like Street Roots, it builds confidence and helps me handle rejection. It puts money in my pocket," he said. "Most of the time I am a happy guy."

He sleeps in a tent when his Social Security disability check runs out, and in a hotel when he can afford it. He is hoping to get a voucher for affordable housing units rumored to be opening up in Northeast Portland. He would like to live in a diverse, multicultural neighborhood. "I want to go to the hood where the flavor is good," he said with a smile.

Until he gets inside, Jim is looking for a two or three man tent to see him through the winter.

Jim sells Street Roots outside Starbucks on Southwest Fifth Avenue and Oak Street and at Public Domain Coffee Shop at Southwest Alder and Broadway.



Answers to Page 15 Puzzles

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THE SINGLE BIGGEST STEP OREGON CAN TAKE ON CLIMATE IS TO BETTTER PROTECT OUR FORESTS.

FOREST DEFENSE IS CLIMATE DEFENSE

FIND OUT MORE AT OREGONWILD.ORG

Photo by Eric DeBord

Looking for a vendor? Call us at 503-967-4664 to find the vendor nearest you. Or go to www.streetroots.org/about/work/vendor/find to see a map of our regular locations.

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