

Courage comes in many forms – just like our vendors

The rain was coming down hard, but still vendors sold Street Roots, draped in ponchos, gripping umbrellas, their newspapers and zines protected in plastic sleeves. It seemed fitting to mark the one-year anniversary since I became executive director by visiting vendors at their sales posts; last year on my first day on the job, I worked as vendor for the day.

Vendors talked to me about how important their relationships are with regular customers, as well as about kindness from employees at nearby stores, like Next Adventure, where Eric Sweger sells. Roger Cavitt meets tourists at his posts near both Pioneer Square and Powells, and he has framed currency from all over the world given to him by

international customers.

As I visited vendors at the sales posts, I was struck, as I always am, that even though it was cold and wet, Street Roots vendors still were out there selling the paper, trying. The poet Charles Olson wrote, "Let those of us who live/try," and Street Roots vendors do this, again and again, often in the wake of other suffering, other struggles.

They are all trying to get something going.

The couple who saved up income selling Street Roots for an RV as shelter, only to have it break down, a heap of immobile metal – they are trying.

So is the woman who decorates her black outfits with blue boas. And the man whose beret is tilted just so, adding flair from his one garbage bag of belongings he lugs along.

So is the man who takes his methadone – and sometimes he weeps, it is so hard, and he has to keep acting on faith that it's all worth it.

So is the woman who shows me a video on her phone of her son cooking her special enchiladas she made him as a child. She was so pleased that he kept her tradition going since she has no kitchen in which to cook, sleeping in a shelter these last few months.

So are all the vendors who take their creativity and do something with it – glazing ceramics, writing poetry, snapping photos. And all of them who tend to their pets – dogs, a bunny named Buddy, a cat named Linguini.

So is the man with his bright socks and floppy hats who laughs hard when he feels up to laughing, and trudges along otherwise.

So is the man, discouraged by his alcohol addiction, who is loving to his friends, including one who died this year. He's full of heart and I

admire that.

I admire the people who walk in off the streets and go through orientation each Tuesday and Friday to start selling Street Roots – they are trying get something going, like the man whose cheek was smeared with tears as he described an eviction notice and a sick mother across the country.

Sometimes, of course, it's very hard to try. People tell me about the housing lists they are on, and how they wait and wait, and sometimes it feels futile. A man worries about a housing voucher letter he's lost. He sleeps on the cold sidewalk and someone recently stole his backpack. It's hard to fully heal in the wet weather, and the cold. Or the summer heat and the dense smoke from the forest fires, for that matter.

And people endure so much violence and so many losses. It was a year of many Street Roots vendor deaths – eight deaths, as well as more of our Old Town neighbors. In fact, we lost a long-time vendor just last week, Ron Britt. Ron called everyone "sunshine" and urged them to "make million." Just that memory makes other vendors smile.

The courage it takes to face the public, clutching the paper, often makes me marvel. It's hard to hide the markings of homelessness – weather-worn hair, chapped skin, sores that won't heal, bags of belongings and trauma that covers the body – and for this, people often endure ill-treatment. They describe feeling invisible or worse.

The holidays can be very hard for people struggling on the streets and outside of festivities. Courage comes in many forms, including just facing another brutal day. Please keep supporting our vendors and share your kindness with everyone on the streets.

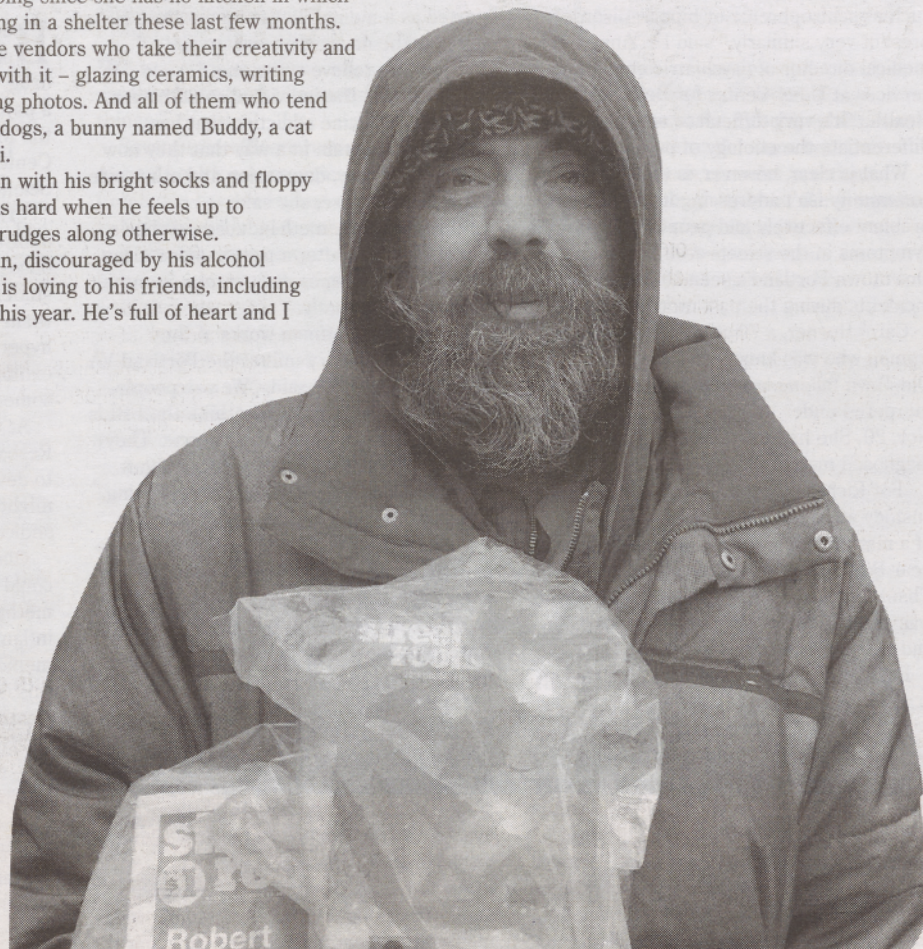
And because individual donations keep us going, please invest in our vendor program by making a recurring donation on Street Roots' website or a one-time donation at the Willamette Week Give!Guide and help us move into our 20th year strong together! Thank you!



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Kaia Sand

Kaia Sand is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach her at kaia@streetroots.org. Follow her on Twitter @mkaiasand



On a recent rainy weekend, Street Roots Vendor Eric Sweger dons heavy-duty gear before heading out to sell the newspaper.

Street Roots

211 NW Davis St.
Portland, OR 97209
503-228-5657
Fax: 503-227-3117
www.streetroots.org
news.streetroots.org
Hours: 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Mon.-Fri., 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat. and 7:30-1 p.m. Sun.

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Staff

Executive Director Kaia Sand
kaia@streetroots.org
Executive Editor Joanne Zuhl
joanne@streetroots.org
Vendor Program Director Cole Merkel
cole@streetroots.org
Development Director Andrew Hogan
andrew@streetroots.org
Senior Staff Reporter Emily Green
emily@streetroots.org
Vendor Coordinator DeVon Pouncey
Administrative Assistant Kayla Jones
Program Assistant Meghan Murphy, Jesuit Volunteer
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