



OCCUPY EUGENE HAS BEEN A HAVEN FOR THE HOMELESS

Homeless Activism

OCCUPY EUGENE SEEKS A LONGER STAY

WORDS BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROB SYDOR

The man who goes by the name Diesel used to sleep under the I-105 overpass at Washington-Jefferson Park. Now that spot is taken up by the Occupy Eugene kitchen. It's tempting to call it makeshift, created as it is out of storage containers and pallets, but the kitchen is sturdy and clean, and John McCahill (aka Big John), who runs it, says almost everyone in the kitchen is a certified food handler.

Technically Diesel is still homeless, but instead of sleeping outside on his own, he serves as the night watchman in the kitchen, a far warmer and drier place to sleep. He works there during the day, helping to provide Occupiers and the homeless with nourishment.

"Some of these people haven't eaten off dishes in so long they just hold out their hand for a scoop of food," McCahill says. He says he's worried about what will happen to Diesel and others like him if the city votes on Dec. 12 to end the Occupy camp in Washington-Jefferson Park.

Occupy organizer and doctoral student in sociology Jamil Jonna says it is the unique way activists and the homeless have come together to create a workable model that makes Occupy Eugene an experiment that should continue beyond the current Dec. 15 expiration date.

Before the Occupy movement, McCahill was never an activist, but Occupy, he says, is different. "It's not just one idea," he says. "This is my idea; this is his idea."

While Occupy Wall Street originally coalesced with a focus on corporate greed, the movement has come to mean different things in different locations, says Esteban, a fellow Occupier who is the contact for OE's Education Alliance Committee. "For every city it has a different purpose," he

says. "Eugene is not the center of corporate oppression, but there are sure severe issues here, including homelessness."

He adds that the Occupy movement "has brought the most drastic social inequalities in Eugene to the forefront."

According to Jonna, almost 2,000 people have signed a petition in favor of extending the camp.

Opponents accuse the camp of costing the city money. A recent story in *The Register-Guard* says, "Through Nov. 29, the city had spent an estimated \$115,804, officials said. Most of that — \$72,731 — has gone to pay police officers to work overtime during Occupy Eugene's marches and protests."

But Jonna says, "We at Occupy can't control the number of people who show up to the protests. For them to push all the costs back to the camp is inaccurate."

The Occupy activists say the camp has helped the homeless and taken some of the stress off others who provide services to those in need. An email to Occupy



"BIG JOHN" MCCAHELL (RIGHT) AND DIESEL IN THE OCCUPY KITCHEN