

# NEEDLES, VOLUNTEERS AND THE MORNING AFTER

Block Party volunteers clean up the Whiteaker BY LAETITIA BÉRAUD

**W**hen many residents of the Whiteaker are sound asleep recovering from Block Party, volunteers will gather Sunday, Aug. 4, to clean up after the event. “We try to have the neighborhood look cleaner than it did before the party,” says Zoe Gadsby, the event coordinator. “It’s really hard to get volunteers the next day.” The work of the volunteers at the Block Party cleanup points to an even bigger community effort: picking up needles.

The streets of the Whit will be filled with all sorts of party vestiges — during the Whiteaker Neighborhood’s last cleanup in June, volunteers found, among other things, around 200 stray needles. Residents organized the cleanup, and the HIV Alliance was among the volunteers. The HIV Alliance’s mission is to support individuals living with HIV/AIDS and prevent new HIV infections. These 200 needles are a drop in the ocean: Last year, the HIV Alliance collected around 400,000 needles through



drop boxes and its needle exchange program in 12 counties in Oregon.

“Those 400,000 used needles that we collected, that’s 400,000 potential infections that we prevented,” says Paul Homan, the prevention assistant manager and men’s community liaison at the HIV Alliance.

The needle exchange program doesn’t just provide one new needle for every stray needle. Running five days a week in different locations throughout the city, the program also provides safer injection and safe sex supplies, wound care and referrals to drug and alcohol detox and treatment.

Getting rid of these stray needles is not only an individual benefit for those using it, it is also for the community as a whole, Bree Nicolello, the PR coordinator at the HIV Alliance, explains. On average, an addicted person injects a thousand times a year. “That’s a thousand chances to risk HIV or another blood-borne disease, and that’s also a thousand chances for a child playing in the river to stab on a dirty needle,” she says.

Gadsby says they are down 30 volunteers compared to last year. To join the team, help clean the Whiteaker and receive a shirt and beer tickets, just show up at Ninkasi any time after 8 am or email whitblockvolunteer@gmail.com with questions. The cleanup lasts until the neighborhood is cleaner than it was before. ■

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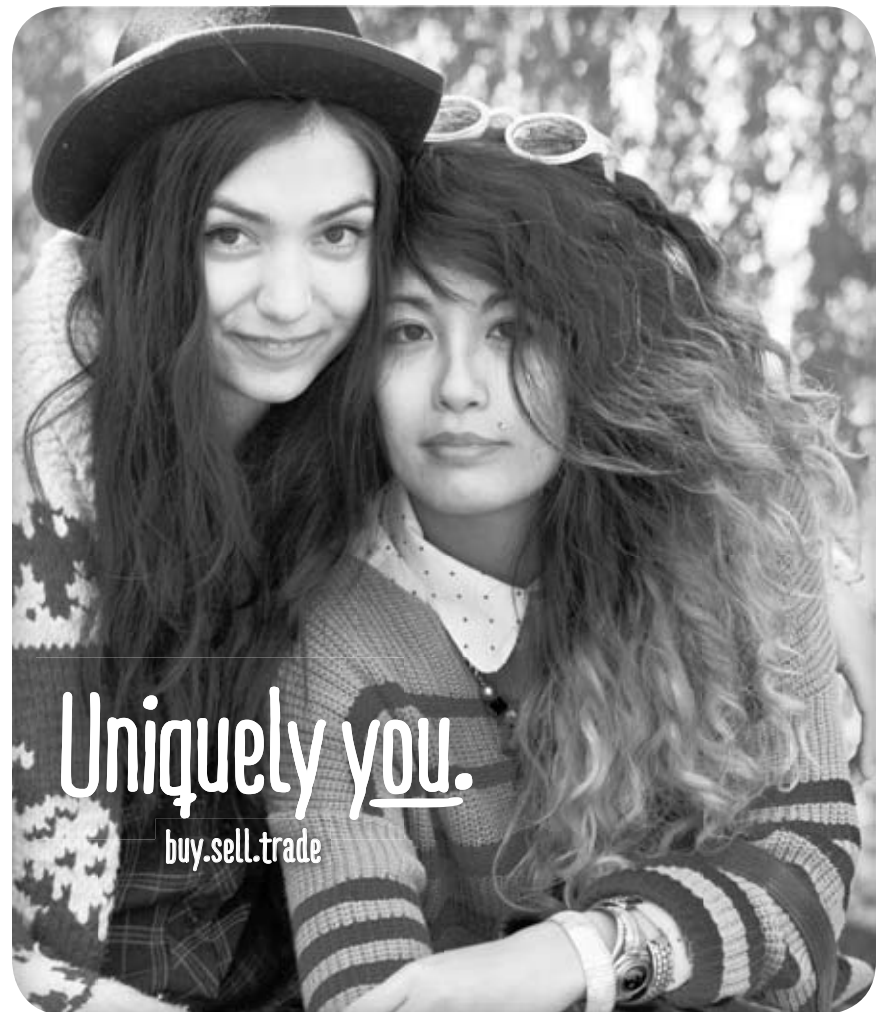
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