

'WE JUST WANT TO KEEP SLIM ALIVE, THROUGH HIS MUSIC AND EVERYTHING,' SAYS EAGLE PARK SLIM'S LONG-TERM PARTNER GWEN JOHNSON



## FAREWELL EAGLE PARK SLIM

PHOTO: PAUL NEEVEL

Local blues institution and Saturday Market staple Eagle Park Slim, né Autry McNeace, passed away at 74 last weekend, leaving behind his partner Gwen Johnson, his son Donnie McNeace, two grandchildren as well as Johnson's nine children and 16 grandchildren. While Slim has had a history of heart failure, and earlier this summer received a wireless heart-monitoring system implant, Johnson tells *EW* the results for cause of death are still pending.

"It is a great loss, but it's a great loss to the city also," Johnson says. "Because he was so loved by everybody."

Originally from Illinois and Colorado, Slim arrived in Eugene in 1980 and quickly became a fixture in the local

music scene. "When Mount St. Helens erupted," Johnson recalls, "he came to town."

Johnson says family would call him "sunshine."

"I would say that in the morning when I'd greet him," she says. "He'd flash that big old smile, and the twinkle in his eye."

Slim did not have insurance, and Johnson is responsible for medical fees and funeral costs. Johnson's daughter Batina Pitts has set up a GoFundMe fundraising page to help pay for the burial, which Johnson tentatively says is set for Saturday, Aug. 27, as well as a celebration of life later at Mac's at the Vet's Club on Willamette Street; both are open to the public with details TBA.

Johnson ordered 1,000 "Ain't No Time to Hate" stickers to hand out, the same stickers and code that many knew Slim to live by. "We just want to keep Slim alive, through his music and everything," she says.

As of press time, the Eagle Park Slim GoFundMe account has raised \$5,999 of the \$7,000 goal.

"Eugene is so wonderful," Johnson says of the help flooding in. "Even though he's from Eagle Park, [Illinois], he said, 'This is my home.'"

There will also be a tribute for Slim at 12:45 pm Saturday, Aug. 27, at the Saturday Market.

To find out more visit the GoFundMe page at [bit.ly/2bMNP60](http://bit.ly/2bMNP60). ■

## NEW TREATMENT CENTER SURGES

Willamette Family Inc., an affordable health care provider that offers services ranging from mental health to substance abuse counseling, recently dramatically increased the number of people it serves at its newest Eugene clinic.

Willamette Family's new Rapid Access Center and Medical Clinic opened January 2016 at 12th and Charnelton, and after serving 123 clients in the first month, Willamette Family says it now serves around 1,000 people per month.

In a recent newsletter, Willamette Family writes, "This number is staggering and only goes to show how many people are seeking help. It is our goal to stop the cycle of addiction and related disorders by treating the causes as

well as the symptoms."

Associate Director Colleen Smith credits the quick rise in clients to the comprehensive care provided by the two new nurse practitioners, Valerie Thomas and Jin Park.

In 2010, Willamette Family received a grant through United Way that allowed it to start offering treatment for uninsured patients, and it says a \$125,000 grant from Trillium Community Health Plan in 2014 allows the nonprofit to provide more affordable care for uninsured or lower income patients.

"We're a convenient one-stop shop," Care Coordinator Janet Bott says of the Rapid Access Center services which meld drug, alcohol and mental health programs with medical care.

Willamette Family began as the Buckley House when George and Honey Buckley decided to help those struggling with alcohol and drug addiction and opened their home to house people seeking treatment. The Buckley House continued to serve and gradually expand throughout Lane County before rebranding to Willamette Family Inc., in 2003. The Buckley House that opened in 1967 still exists and provides "sobering services" across from Wash-

ington-Jefferson Park.

Willamette Family now has eight locations throughout Lane County and has specialized programs for men, women and families. Programs range from substance abuse to child's mental health to housing for recovering families.

Willamette Family attributes its increase in numbers treated at its Rapid Access Center to its individualized care. There are eight peer-support employees, people who have struggled in the past with substance abuse or other problems, that help the clients feel more comfortable. Peer-support employees help the patients stay on top of their medication, organize transportation and act as a guide through the treatment process.

"We want to reduce patient stress and give them the best care possible," Smith tells *EW*. "We want everyone who comes in to be treated like they are the only person here."

The nonprofit cites collaborations with other care providers in Lane County, such as White Bird and Trillium, as a reason for its ability to provide comprehensive treatment.

"We bring hope," Smith says. "Hope lives here." ■