

So I'll ask again right here in the *Weekly*. To the city of Eugene: Can you assure the community that no city resources will be used whatsoever to assist federal immigration efforts? Will you use your positions of power to speak out against the federal government's crackdown on immigrant communities?

Kamryn Stringfield
Eugene

Help the Small Communities

Many rural towns across Oregon, including places like Marcola, face slow economic growth caused by excessive regulations, limited investment, poor infrastructure and a shrinking workforce.

To help revitalize these communities, I propose a set of market-driven reforms to reduce government barriers and empower local entrepreneurs. These include simplified “rural starter permits” to ease the startup process and reduce fees, streamlined zoning for home-based businesses and tax incentives to attract private investment.

Launching microloan programs and encouraging co-op markets can strengthen local capital without relying on unsustainable government handouts. At the same time, improving entrepreneurship education in high schools and developing business apprenticeships with local employers will help close rural skills gaps.

Expanding broadband through public-private partnerships and offering digital literacy workshops will connect small towns to modern economic opportunities and support remote work hubs.

These reforms reward private risk-taking, encourage voluntary cooperation and promote economic self-reliance. Rather than rely on limited government grants, we can give rural Oregonians the tools and freedom to grow businesses, create jobs and build long-term prosperity.

Thank you for considering this vision for Oregon's rural future.

Kaden Brown
Marcola



Illustration by
Jade Wilkerson



(L-R) LEIGH GALBRAITH, SOPHIA RICCI AND BRIDGETTE BUTLER OF BLACK THISTLE STREET AID Photo by Eve Weston

AIDING BLACK THISTLE

Black Thistle Street Aid celebrates five years helping Eugene's unhoused community with an anniversary fundraiser at Whirled Pies

BY EMMA J NELSON

Black Thistle Street Aid is celebrating its fifth year of operating in relative obscurity with a fundraiser Thursday, June 26.

“The larger community might not know us, or housed people might not know us,” says Bridgette Butler, the nonprofit’s co-director, “but folks on the street know us, and that’s who we’re here to support.”

You may not have seen the 12-volunteer team at work in the past five years, but they’ve been busy walking the train tracks, rolling wagons through the parks and driving past camps to provide assistance to those in need.

Black Thistle provides a variety of free services to unhoused individuals, including monthly pop-up clinics, providing medical and reproductive health care; weekly roving outreach clinics, bringing care directly to encampments in the Eugene-Springfield area; and public health education through the distribution of Black Thistle’s *Word on the Street* zine.

The clinics are operated by volunteer medical doctors, nurse practitioners,

physician assistants, wound nurses, emergency medical technicians and clinical herbalists.

“Herbalism is like the first foot in the door for people, because they have so much harm from Western medicine that they’re maybe not willing to talk to the doctor yet about antibiotics,” Butler says, “but they will talk to me about an herbal alternative with the understanding that if it gets too bad, there’s only so much herbs will do, and I can’t ethically continue.”

Black Thistle is run by three co-directors: Butler, a clinical herbalist; Leigh Galbraith, a wound care nurse; and Sophia Ricci, a reproductive doula. Despite having three different specialties, the three work as one cohesive unit, ensuring that each patient knows all of them.

“If one of us is unavailable, each of us has created our own rapport with someone,” Galbraith says, which guarantees that patients always have someone they trust on hand.

Ricci adds, “If there’s multiple people who are supporting the same person, then it creates more of a net of support. So it’s like, ‘Black Thistle’s got me, Bridgette’s fucking got me.’”

Black Thistle first began providing aid during the summer 2020 demonstrations protesting George Floyd’s murder, where the group was originally tasked with providing medical care to protesters.

“All of the marches were going past Washington Jefferson Park, which at that time was an encampment of several hundred people,” Butler says. “Most

of the care that we were providing as medics was to folks on the street, not necessarily to the protesters.”

The group continued providing care at Washington Jefferson Park, Butler says, but come wildfire season they realized they needed to be doing more.

“One clinic in one stationary place, it’s helpful, but it’s not seeing people hiding in the alleys or wherever they are,” Butler says. “Going to where people are, where the needs are, that just kind of became what we did.”

As of Jan. 3, Black Thistle has served 12,794 individuals since its inception in July 2020. Just in 2024, medical providers saw 195 unique patients at pop-up clinics and outreach visits. At Black Thistle’s two-hour June 11 pop-up clinic, Butler, Galbraith and Ricci were able to provide medical attention to nine individuals.

“It sounds so cheesy to be like, ‘We can’t do what we do without you,’ but we really cannot do what we do without community support, and have not been able to do what we’ve done without community support,” Butler says.

Black Thistle’s five year anniversary fundraiser features musical performances by Mud City Old-Time Society, Apex Predators and Forest Mountain Lion; testimonials from clients and stories from the streets of Eugene; a raffle and silent auction; and more.

Funds raised from the anniversary celebration go directly towards the care provided by Black Thistle, Butler says. For instance, \$25 can purchase enough supplies for 20 first aid kits, \$30 can provide someone a tent or a sleeping bag, and \$100 can guarantee someone an overnight hotel stay for medical respite.

Five years post-inception, and Black Thistle’s co-directors still strive for a safer, healthier life for Eugene and Springfield’s unhoused community.

“I believe another world is possible, so how do we get there? Just keep showing up,” Ricci says.

Galbraith adds, “My community is everyone, whether they have a house or they don’t have a house. It feels like my responsibility, really all of our responsibility, to take care of our community.”

Black Thistle Street Aid’s Five Year Anniversary Fundraiser is 6 pm to 10 pm Thursday, June 26, at Whirled Pies, 199 West 8th Avenue. Tickets are on a sliding scale of \$20 to \$100 at the door, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds. Visit BlackThistleStreetAid.org or call 541-232-8546 for more information on Black Thistle services.

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