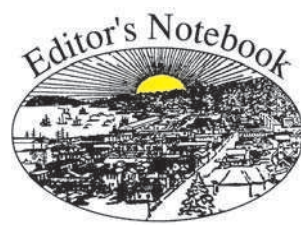


Street Roots tabloid gives homeless vendors self-confidence and self-worth



Street Roots' vendors are homeless people. When I see them in Portland, I buy their paper. The tabloid they sell has a decidedly different perspective.

"People think of us as the homeless paper, says, Israel Bayer, the newspaper's executive director. "They open it up and are impressed.

"Our first goal and mission is to provide a low-barrier income opportunity to people experiencing homelessness and poverty. The income is a key aspect of what we do. The human connectivity and the relationship between the vendor, the business and the reader becomes a real community. It gives the vendor self-confidence and self-worth."

The paper's content is typically the stuff of social activism. In the issue I recently purchased is a cover piece on what immigrant forest restoration workers face. An editorial in the issue proclaims: "Many (forest workers) have been exploited, intimidated and subjected to dangerous working conditions, but widespread fear of retaliation keeps their plight largely in the shadows."

For all of our vaunted connectivity through social media, the widespread habit is to reduce social and political factions to two-dimensional cardboard cut-outs. That is especially so for how we view street people. *Street Roots* puts a face on these people in two ways. They are on the street, selling the paper. And in *SR* there is a vendor profile, which tells the story of their financial struggle.

Bayer describes the vendor-buyer exchange: "For the reader, it's a safe space to engage with people they wouldn't have engaged with."

The Portland newspaper is a nonprofit company. It has 160 vendors. It is part of the Street Paper Movement that can be found in 120 newspapers in 40 countries. These papers have been around since the 1990s. They have a shared news wire.

The quality of the street papers varies considerably. When I purchased the San Francisco version, I was disappointed with its thin content. Bayer says that Portland, Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia, are in "the upper echelon of marrying quality journalism with the social component."

Joanne Zuhl, *Street Roots*' managing editor came from the Appleton, Wisconsin, newspaper. She started as a volunteer at another property in the Street Paper Movement in 2002.

"We decided a long time ago we weren't going to be a stereotypical homeless paper," says Zuhl. "While we do have that topic organically running through our pages, we look at the larger theme of injustice and economic issues." Zuhl wrote "Timber's fallen," the three-part series about immigrant forestry workers.

In the issue I most recently purchased, the actor Ian McKellen talks about Shakespeare. That interview came from the street paper wire.

"Never lack sympathy with the poor," wrote Joseph Pulitzer in *The New York World* on May 10, 1883. Pulitzer's admonition speaks loudly today. In fact, Bayer notes how homelessness has become more of a mainstream topic in Portland, where Mayor Charlie Hales has declared a homeless emergency. "*Street Roots* has owned the conversation around homelessness," says Bayer, "but now other media are in the beat."

Zuhl describes how *Street Roots* moves Portland's civic discourse. "Our readers are the people going to work downtown and commuting. People who buy it are the movers and shakers of Portland."

'We decided a long time ago we weren't going to be a stereotypical homeless paper.'

Like the unconventional aspect of Bayer's paper. Providing income opportunity and a voice for the dispossessed is at least two things. It is one of the new ways of doing business in our new century. It also hearkens back to the notion of a "crusading newspaper," a term that was more common in the era of Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst.

If you read the national business press' headlines, you might easily believe that technology is the only business that matters. And if you are less than enormously profitable, you aren't worthy of attention from the national business press.

Well beneath the level of huge, publicly traded corporations, there are mid-sized and small businesses that populate all cities and towns. The perspective of these smaller companies is much different than what you read about in national newspapers and business magazines. Our profit margins are much smaller. The notion of hitting a bonanza is far-fetched.

—S.A.F.



"From the time I started, most women who were well-known then, I could almost count on one hand. (Today) there are many more women doing stand-up. They don't make themselves the butt of the joke. They have a point of view."
— LILY TOMEL

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NEWS

COMMUNITY

CULTURE

'Our first goal and mission is to provide a low-barrier income opportunity to people experiencing homelessness and poverty. The income is a key aspect of what we do.'

Israel Bayer
executive editor of Street Roots



Open forum

Undeserving

So, what is wrong with people today, when they are willing to adopt the persona of destitute, homeless individuals so they can panhandle on the streets near Fred Meyer and Safeway to make a living?

The regulars, especially at the Warrenton Fred Meyer location, are not only not homeless, I am told, but they have their automobile parked around the corner to drive home in, and have been offered several jobs. So they could earn a productive living, yet they choose to beg for money on

the corner, making otherwise gainfully employed citizens support them. I guess it is kind of like the current political administration; perhaps that is where they got the idea.

For my part, I would be more willing to pay these individuals wages, by donating to their jar whenever I am shopping if their sign said: "This is how I make a living, so please make a donation; Thank you." At least I would know what I was paying for, and would be more inclined to do so.

When these posers stand there (only in good weather, mind you) purporting to be destitute

and homeless when they are not, they are only casting aspersions on those in real need, and making it harder for those individuals to get the help they deserve.

Just a thought, I could be wrong.

DAVID GRAVES
Astoria

Support police

I attended the Feb. 24 Coffee with a Cop at Peter Ipan Market. It was great to meet with several of our Astoria Police Department personnel.

Because of so much negative press about other police departments, I think it's important to support our local police department. A way to do this is to attend the Astoria City Council meetings, which meet the first and third Mondays of each month at 7 p.m., on the second floor in City Hall. The city website, www.astoria.or.us, has the meeting agenda and minutes.

I think we need several more police around town. Does anyone else agree?

MARY WALTHER
Astoria



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DAILY ASTORIAN

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