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Fighting the battles of addiction

BY CARI HACHMANN
 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

An ex-addict recalls the hellish experience of a coming down on drugs in a jail cell: "Pretty soon you don't get high —you get sick. The euphoria is gone. Without heroin in your system, your body is limp as a dishrag. You feel pain all over. You're throwing up, shaking, sweating, and your bowels are loose.

"But all you can think about is getting free, so you can get high again, and make the pain go away. And when you finally do, you make sure to get so high that your wretched soul vanishes from this godforsaken earth. Then, the night passes, you wake up under a bridge, again, and wonder—Damn, I'm still here."

Louise Wedge, a Georgia-born recovering addict who was trapped in Portland's drug underworld for 35 years can safely say she has no plans of turning back to addiction and looks forward to her life of recovery.

Clean for the past 16 years, Wedge is no longer the lonely, devastated woman she used to be. "I have my mind back. I can think. I have a few dollars in my pocket, I bought a house, I bought a car, I'm raising plants," she said, listing the good things about recovery on a floral sofa in her north Portland home.

With much to celebrate, Wedge and hundreds of people like her will gather this Labor Day, on Monday, Sept. 5 at 10 a.m. to join in unity for "Hands Across the Bridge," an annual event spanning the Interstate Bridge across the Columbia River that pays tribute to National Recovery Month and the freedom from addiction.

Victims of drug and alcohol abuse, eager to give back to the community they once clung to, will share a message of hope for those still struggling. For the most extreme, getting sober is the only choice next to dying in the hands of drugs.

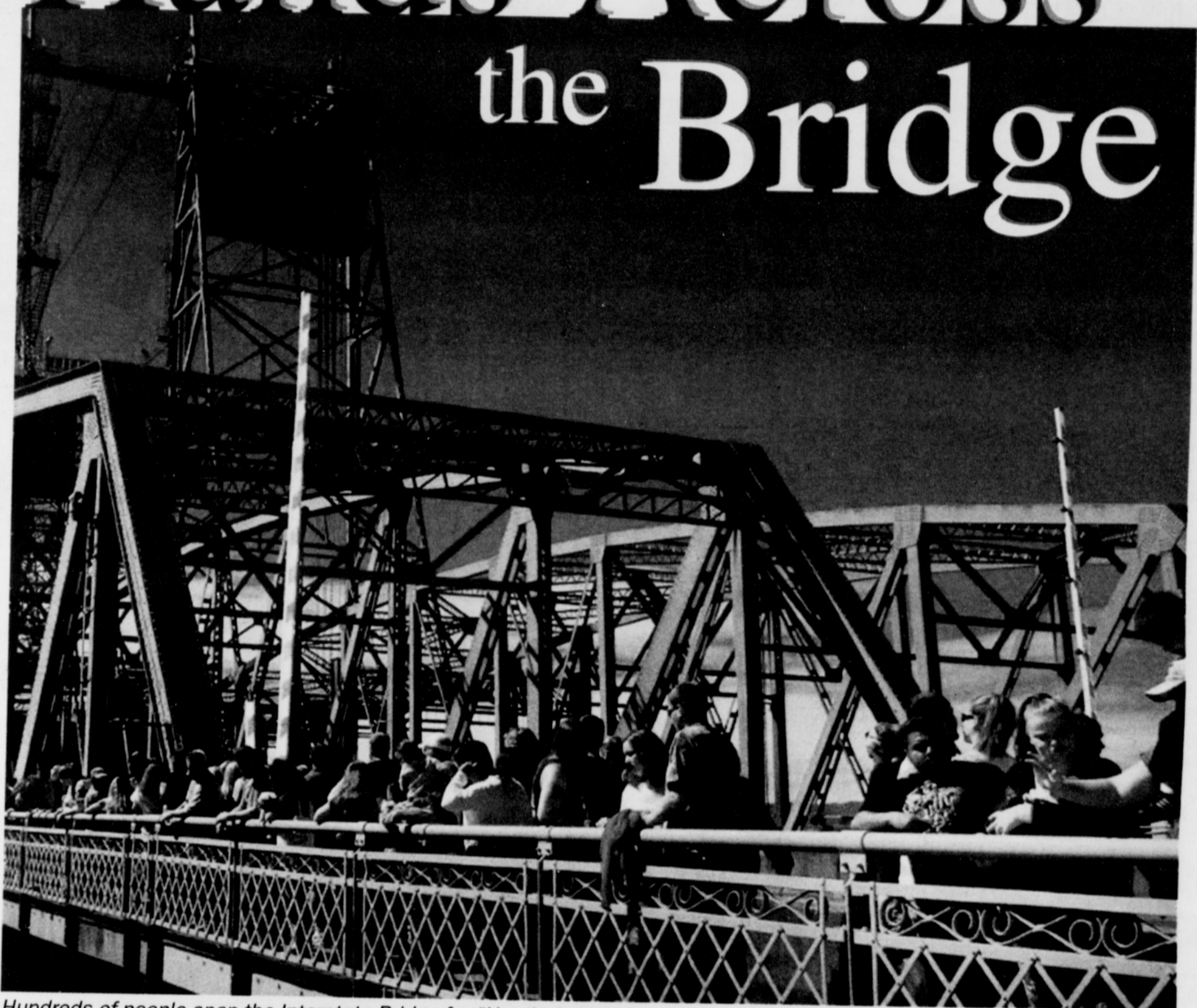
Patty Katz, the founder of Hands Across the Bridge and a former drug pal of Wedge, never stopped drinking after she was hospitalized for alcohol poisoning at 18. "The more addicted I was, the bigger the hole in my soul grew," she said.

Katz drank her way through the 1960's and experimented her way out of every social group she came across. Later, she found heroin and abused it so much that she stuck needles in every skin pore she could find. Sinking further from society, she spent months in and out of jail, treatment, and the streets.

At rock bottom and her arms poisoned by strychnine, a nurse told her, "Ma'am you're going to lose your arms if you don't stop using dope." But as a junkie out of control,

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Hands Across the Bridge



Hundreds of people span the Interstate Bridge for "Hands Across the Bridge" to share the message of hope for people struggling with addictions and those in recovery. This year's annual event is Labor Day, Monday, Sept. 5.



Louise Wedge is celebrating 16 years of being clean from drugs with this year's annual "Hands Across the Bridge" community celebration.



Patty Katz shares a message of hope for those struggling with addiction.