



Needles with the residue of illegal drugs are found and picked up by a Portland Park Ranger along the Vera Katz East Esplanade.

The Parks have Eyes

continued **▲** from front

While they don't carry a gun and can't arrest you, they do have the authority to kick you out of a park for violating any rule under city code Title 20. But for the most part their intentions are true: to make people feel safe and enjoy their park experience.

Citizens may have noticed an uptick in the number of forest green-clad Park Rangers cruising down city streets and around the Waterfront on mountain bikes.

That's because last spring Portland Parks and Recreation expanded their Park Rangers program from one full-time, year-around ranger, hired in 2010 to patrol Forest Park, to include three more full-time rangers to patrol the city's central business district and downtown's 16 parks.

In addition, PPR has employed 10 seasonal park rangers who cover the more than 275 parks in southwest, southeast, north and northeast Portland.

During winter months, the seasonal rangers are on-call, while in summer they go to work on regular

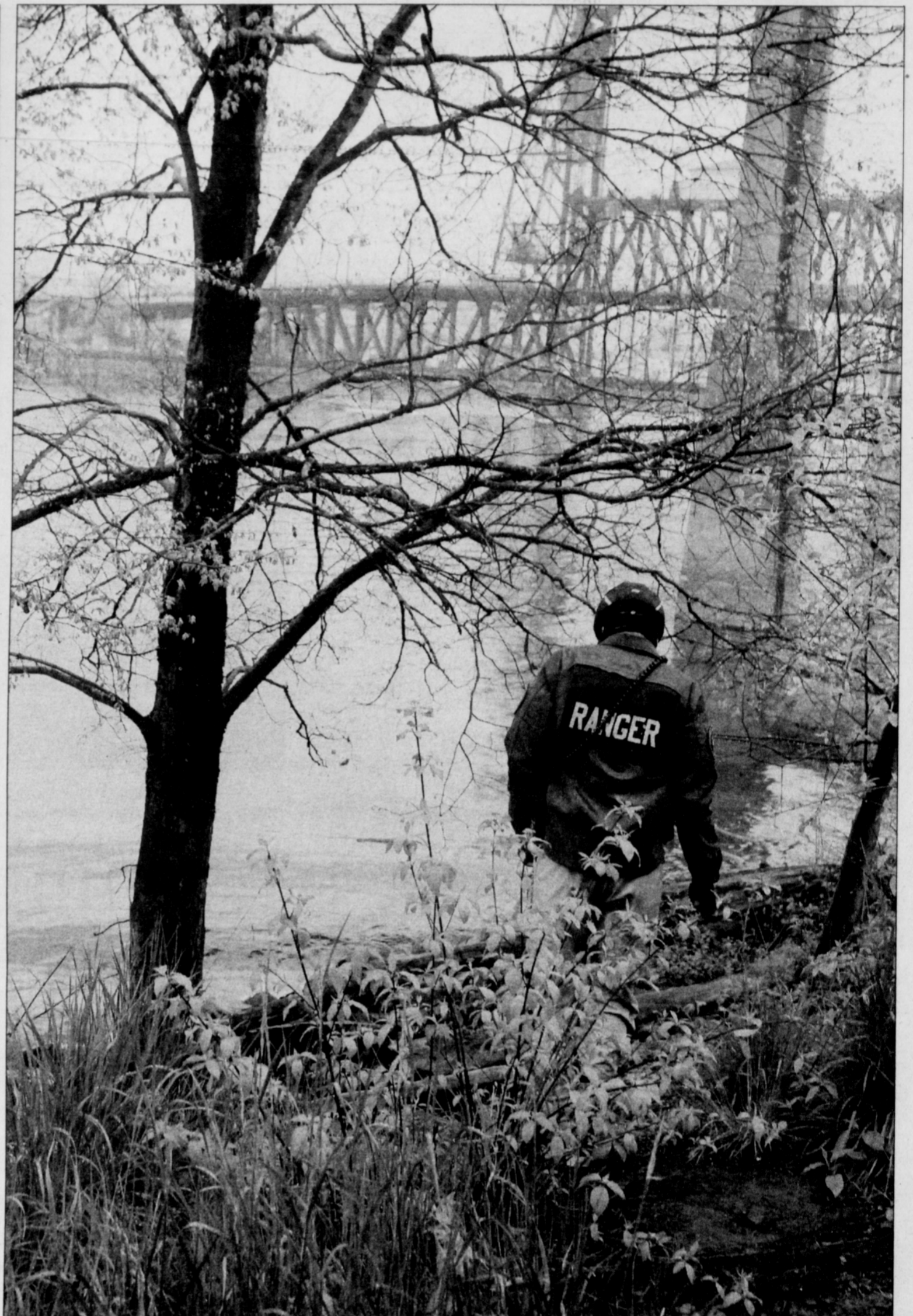
schedules as more people take advantage of the fresh air and green space that comes with warmer weather.

Generally, parks in Portland are pretty safe. You can find the business clad taking lunch in Chapman Square, hikers cruising Forest Park, dog walkers strolling Mount Tabor, mothers pushing baby strollers in Laurelhurst, teens playing ball at Irvington, hipsters blanketing Colonel Summers Park with bikes and hula hoops while toddlers running through Waterfront fountains.

Sometimes, however, danger lurks.

Last summer, the crossfire from two young men who pumped bullets through a family-packed Peninsula Park in north Portland, heightened safety concerns. The suspected gang-related incident gave reason for the city to boost security at community centers. This summer, there will be closer to 20 seasonal parks rangers on patrol, instead of 10.

"Park Rangers are additional eyes and ears for the community and the police," said Hasan Artharee, who



PHOTOS BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Park Ranger Vicente Harrison stumbles onto a camp site on the east side of the Willamette River, south of the Steel Bridge. Rangers are trained to converse with the array of people they encounter. Violations of park rules can result in something as simple as explanation of park rules to a formal warning or 30-day exclusion from the park.

worked 14 years in private security before PPR hired him shortly before the Peninsula shooting as the Park Ranger Supervisor.

Because a security camera pointed at the exit of a park bathroom door aided in the arrest of the Peninsula shooters, PPR has also decided to increase the number of security cameras at Portland's community centers from 89 cameras to 140 system-wide.

"Parks can become magnets for predators," said Portland Park Rangers Security Manager Art Hendricks. "We want to make sure we have good measures in place that if an incident were to occur, we could work with the law to apprehend such folks," including sex offenders and vandals.

Since 1997, the city had relied on private security, contracted season-

ally, to patrol parks and keep an eye on up to a 1,000 more city owned and operated properties undesignated for public use.

But in 2010, the parks department ditched the private company for their own Park Rangers program. PPR wanted to put a face to their department and make park rangers ambassadors of city parks.

Using existing funds, PPR hired park rangers to not only provide security and enforce city codes, but to build friendlier and more familiar relationships with people in the community.

Diversifying the ranger force was a big part of that said Artharee. "We wanted to get individuals from the community who could interact and build relationships with the people they served."

While all rangers are state certi-

fied by the Department of Public Safety, Hendricks said they wanted their rangers to go "above and beyond" providing security, and be able to interact with individuals affected by community-wide issues like the mentally ill and homeless.

Park Rangers train with Oregon State Parks, the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, and the Portland Police Bureau as well as in the field with youth gang outreach.

"As we increase our role, we've taken a much more active role in working with other public safety partners—not only police, but across jurisdictional lines," said Hendricks.

Park Rangers typically pair off and patrol the 15 to 30 parks in their quadrants, making rounds twice in one shift. Rangers outside downtown rove in vehicles while downtown rangers cruise by bike.