Homeless *from page 1A*

The film Wolf of Wall Street was playing on a big flat screen as people of all ages gathered around, watching, laughing. Koddas pointed to the many bins that lined the rooms wall.

"We've got bedding for folks, and some hats and gloves that we hand out," he said. "We've got plenty of blankets and handwarmers, air mattresses, pillow cases. When they're here, they can use the pillows and blankets. And we offer them some scarfs and hats."

He pulled out a handmade knit hat, smiled.

"That's a cool hat," he said. "A lot of love went into that. Original kind of style. That's kind of cool. Feel free to walk around and talk to folks. Here's an interesting couple right here. I don't know much about that gentleman right there. Feel free to tell them who you are. They'll talk to you."

Sitting at one of the tables table were two older men, one sipping a cup of coffee, one working in a notebook.

"I'm really ashamed of being homeless," the man with the coffee said. "I shouldn't be homeless."

He paused a bit, then looked at the man sitting next to him.

"But he's a good talker," he said, pointing to a man we'll call James. "He doesn't talk really loud, that's his problem."

"Yeah, I'm a quiet guy," James said.

But he was willing to talk.

James

"I just got laid off from construction. The last two jobs I worked I got laid off from. I got laid off of [a local restaurant] because that's seasonal. Got laid off on Labor Day. And then I got a job in construction, but things slowed down in the winter.

But it's not hard to find a job, not really, if you look hard. And I've really been looking hard. I know there's opportunity out there. I can't say whether I will find a job or not. It's just up to your enthusiasm and how much you want to survive. I don't have anything else. It's just me.

But I don't want to leave Florence. Every time I hear about Eugene, I hear about the police situation and I hear about how bad they are on the homeless and how hard it is to find a job there.

It's just the same about everywhere else. Unless you have some kind of inheritance or your family has done well, or you've got good backing, you fall to the wayside and you're dependent on government money. Or something else. Whatever skills you could sell.

My background is various. It goes from doing reservations from Continental Airlines to delivering bread for a bakery. It's whatever my skills can do.

But with my last job here, I'm finding I'm too old to do construction work. Age is a big factor. I can't do roofing with my back. I can't put drywall up on the celling with my back. If you can't do that, then…

He had me working in people's homes, charging $65 an hour, for stuff that I wasn't even sure what I was doing. It was just a situation that I was shoved into doing a job, that I know I could do, and I wanted to do right, but the employers don't train. I told him I could do drywall and things like that, but he had a list of 20 other things. Can you put in a deck, can you do lighting, tilework? He gave a whole list of things, but I couldn't do it.

The employers know that there's a job market out there for any sucker who comes along, and they'll treat you like that too. I don't mind doing more, if I know how to do the job. But most employers just treat you like you're a disposable commodity.

But I'm going to keep trying. Struggling to do what I can. You just have to have a fighting spirit.

I'm staying in my car, while it still runs. It's a 1995 Legacy. Old, but I see Legacy's all over the place."

At that point, Hobbit sat at the table. We asked what brought him in. "Cold!" he said, then talked about his situation.

Hobbit

"I've been in Florence for eight, nine years.

I was in a motorcycle wreck and have a metal leg. A few months ago, I broke my neck. I have four screws in it.

I applied for SSDI (Social Security Disability) and been denied, denied, denied. So, my lawyer wants to sue the insurance company, so I'm waiting for the results of that.

I have Trillium, OHP and I'm a vet, and you want me to pay the medical when I was in a vehicle and got injured? That's what it's coming down to. I was in an accident. I've never paid a medical bill in my life, and they want $129,000 for my neck.

I was at Regency, I was at RiverBend, and then they kicked me out because my insurance said 30 days and that's it. I said, well what about my VA? But they wouldn't. Nobody wants to pay my medical.

I had a place before the accident. I had an apartment, I had my life. I was in a motorcycle wreck. Now I got into this car wreck, and the lady who owns the car is pretty well to do. And my lawyer is going to sue her personally now. I might end up with a good chunk of change. I pray, dude.

"When it gets to be 37, 38 degrees, we can't come here. It's got to be 32 or below to get in here. It's hard at 37 degrees. I believe that in my heart. But you try and explain it to people who go home to an apartment or a house or a trailer. Where they got heat. That green duffle bag right there is mine. And it has a sleeping bag in it. That's where I live. I don't have a home."

— Hobbit, who stayed at the Emergency Cold Weather Shelter

If I got my money and got my place, I'd go into my home and not leave. I would call my friends, 'You go do what you want, but I'm sitting in this house.' It's too cold out there. And it's getting colder and colder all the time.

When it gets to be 37, 38 degrees, we can't come here. It's got to be 32 or below to get in here. It's hard at 37 degrees. I believe that in my heart. But you try and explain it to people who go home to an apartment or a house or a trailer. Where they got heat. That green duffle bag right there is mine. And it has a sleeping bag in it. That's where I live. I don't have a home. If I had a home, I would run around in my boxers."

We asked if Hobbit had been working, at which point he and James got into a conversation.

"I've been in so many accidents, even if I did fill out an application, they wouldn't give me the job," Hobbit said. "I have a steel rod in this leg, I have a plastic elbow, and then I just got my neck done. Second of all, you go fill out an application, and they ask where you live. I live in the bushes. I'm not going to get a job because of that."

"You don't have the basic stuff, like showers," James said.

Hobbit agreed. "I don't have none of that. I got a valid ID. I just don't understand. I can go pump gas. But they won't give me a job because of my injuries."

"You're in limbo," James said.

"I can't do nothin,'" Hobbit said. "I sit here and I pray, and I hold a sign. I hold a sign to make money. And I hate doing that, but I have to survive. There's no way I can live. If I want cigarettes, I have to go to McDonalds with a sign that says, 'Anything helps, God bless.' And they give me two, three dollars, a couple of hamburgers. And then I go get a pack of cigarettes and sit in the park. And wait for the night. And then I pull out my sleeping bag and all my stuff. And I'm not moving.

"These people don't really get it. You're lucky you're not injured. You're very fortunate. Once you get hurt once, unless you got a rich mom or dad or grandpa, you're in trouble."

James said, "Safety nets aren't stable."

"They aren't," Hobbit answered. "It's not fair in this world. In the '60s, you didn't have to lock your door. You left your keys in the car. You do that today and see what happens. They'll steal your car, your house, your bed and your wife. It's not right what people do anymore. It's amazing to me.

"I carry that duffel bag down the street. I don't know how many times the police stop me. I don't have no warrants or anything. They know me."

"Why do they do it? Just to annoy you?" James asked.

"They just don't really get it," he responded. "You have to go on the other side of the bridge or pass Fred Meyer. But then, if you go on the other side of the bridge, that's a state park. You can go over there and stay for a week, legally. If the ranger comes, he ain't going to say a word to you. He'll tag your tent, and he'll come back in a week. If you're there, they take it. And I don't get it. It's a state park. You're not doing anything but eating and sleeping and trying to get a job or getting my SSDI or whatever. And you displace people who just needs money."

James referred back to sanitation issues.

"You know what I figure? If you pack it in, you pack it out," Hobbit responded. "You mean to tell me that you can carry a 12 pack of beer and some hamburgers out there, and you can't bring them cans and trash back? Please. Get a fire going and burn your trash."

"I understand that, but there's body functions as well," James said.

"Well, they make plastic bags you can use for that," Hobbit answered.

"And you're conscientious. I am too," James said. "A lot of people aren't, and that's what people have a problem with."

Hobbit agreed. "I hear you loud and clear. You can go to a lot of places and see trash all over the place. I hear you on that end very strong, but not everybody is like that.

"I love life and I love people to death. It's just, you know, some people have bad issues and bad problems and most people see you with a backpack and think, 'Oh, he's got a drug problem, or he's got this.' I don't have that. I smoke cigarettes and I have a couple beers. That ain't against the law, they're both legal."

James nodded. "When he says a couple of beers, I can back him up. He hardly drinks."

Hobbit said, "No, I may have one or two beers, and I don't drink till the afternoon. I don't wake up at six o'clock in the morning and have a beer. But once you carry that backpack… If I walk around like I'm dressed right now, 'My God, he's clean.' But if you carry a backpack in this town, they trash you. It's getting worse in this town."

James said, "If there's somewhere better, I'll go there."

Hobbit, who has been around town for about 10 years, said, "In the last six months, I've seen so many new faces. They come floating in, and then the issues come, and then they blame it all on everyone who carries a backpack. And that's not a true statement. A lot of people get run out. You end up with tickets, and if you don't go to court, there's a warrant and they take you to jail. Most people leave town before they go to jail. Me, take me to jail."

"It's not that good," James protested. "It's not three squares, more like a cookie, and a granola bar and an orange."

"And a slice of bread with some peanut butter," Hobbit said. "And they lock you in the cell for 24 hours. It's very uncomfortable. I'm not proud of being that person. But when you get pushed and pushed by everyone, you just get tired of it. And get in trouble.

"If someone were to say to me, 'Hey, I got a part time job that you can live in my backyard, I would be there. And I'd go get a tent. I don't have one."

"Every time you get one, someone steals it," James said.

"All I have is a tarp," Hobbit said. "I put down my tarp and I put down my sleeping bag. If it rains, I get up and go sit at Safeway or the Civic Center. Or the library. Somewhere where it ain't rainin'. To me, this man right here is a millionaire," gesturing at James. "He has a car. If I had a car, I'd been living there."

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FRAUDVILLE
Saturday, February 9, 2019 ★ 5-9 p.m.
FLORENCE EVENTS CENTER
GAMES
FOOD
BEER, WINE & SODA
Annual Lip-Sync Contest
includes bands from
Oregon Pacific Bank
Coast Insurance
Coastal Fitness
TR Hunter
& More!
ICE CREAM BUFFET
DOOR PRIZES
RAFFLES
Silent, Live & Dessert Auctions
(Items include a trip to HAWAII and Ducks football SEASON TICKETS)
TICKETS:
$30.00
available at Banner Bank, Coast Insurance Services & Boys and Girls Club
also available at the door on the night of the event
Call 541-590-3508 for VIP Tickets
$50 - assigned seating & special prizes
BENEFITTING: BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF WESTERN LANE COUNTY

CANS 4 GRADS
BOTTLE/CAN DRIVE
Saturday, February 9th
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Siuslaw Middle School
Drop off your bottles and cans
during the designated time to help fund
Siuslaw HS Project Graduation.
If you are unable to deliver your cans and bottles,
call and schedule a pickup by contacting
Brandi Taniguchi @ 541.999.7312