

NO HOUSE, BUT NOT HOMELESS

By **BRENNA VISSER**
The Bulletin



HOW TO HELP

For suggestions on how to help the region's residents experiencing homelessness, contact the Homeless Leadership Coalition by email at info@cohomeless.org.

BEND — Michael Parker doesn't consider himself homeless.

Instead, he considers himself houseless because he does not live in a structure most people would consider a house.

Parker, 46, is one of dozens if not hundreds who live in the wilderness off China Hat Road in Bend. He said he goes by the nickname "Rev," because he considers himself a reverend of a religion he refers to as "Parkerism." The basic tenets: Don't be rude and stay happy.

He lives under an intricate setup of tarp and trailer. Inside he has made an insulated fireplace out of scrap metal and rocks to stay warm and as a way to reduce fire danger.

The tarp, which is hung beneath two trees and serves as the walls of his home, is adorned with art.

Perhaps not a house, but definitely his home, Parker said.

Due to a variety of mental and physical disabilities, living in a traditional house or apartment is difficult and feels like confinement, he said.

"I like to be able to pick up and move in 25 minutes," Parker said.

For the last 15 years or so, Parker

has been in Central Oregon and living outside in some capacity.

Parker doesn't remember what exactly brought him to Central Oregon, other than he enjoys the cold nights and warm days the High Desert climate provides.

He has lived at several camps in Bend, including the camp that was cleared by the Oregon Department of Transportation off Revere Avenue last year.

Parker moved to China Hat Road roughly six months ago because he thought it would be a better place for his dog to have puppies.

Before coming to Central Oregon, Parker said he lived in Chicago. He used to be a chef and, at one point, owned a house, Parker said.

"I like to eat. I've always been into food," Parker said. "But it got too hard to do."



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Michael Parker in the camp structure off of China Hat Road that he calls home.

In the past, Parker said he has been told he has dissociative identity disorder, more commonly known as multiple personality disorder, and ADHD, because he hears voices and can't concentrate.

He said he doesn't agree with those assessments from professional behavioral health workers.

Parker's only income comes from donations from nonprofits and individuals. He has tried to apply for disability in the past but finds it difficult to focus long enough to complete it.

"I get frustrated, and then I give up," he said.

When asked what he would say to

the people who may judge the way he lives, Parker suggested people shouldn't judge in the first place.

"If you don't like it, don't look," Parker said.

Parker represents a subset of the Central Oregon homeless population who choose to live outdoors, said Colleen Thomas, Deschutes County's homeless outreach coordinator.

Thomas said it is important to remember every person's reasons for becoming houseless are personal, but in general that in her work she has rarely seen someone start off wanting to live outside.

There are usually several fac-

tors, like someone getting fatigued hitting barrier after barrier or a consistent experience hitting red tape, she said.

People can become discouraged when they attempt to use resources, like a shelter, but are met with staff that is not trained enough to handle a mental illness-related episode, and so they get trespassing.

It can lead to people becoming isolated, and an easier response is to choose to live outside of society because when they do try to engage in resources, they have negative experiences where they feel punished, Thomas said.

Instead of asking why someone doesn't want to live inside, advocates need to consider what led them to that response, Thomas said.

"How is the system on a large scale being unable to support that individual in maintaining some sense of stability?" Thomas said.

Thomas said for some people, it might take months or years to get more comfortable in a community setting, and it's important to consistently meet people where they are at to address their needs.

"Having the consistency of following up and following through goes further than we ever know," she said.

SENIOR Outlook Chester's

Prairie City Seniors

Rose Coombs



Do you remember what huge thing happened 42 years ago? Mount St. Helens blew its top. If you were very quiet, you could have heard the sound of the explosion here in

Grant County. By the time it got to us, it was just a soft thump, however. 'Twas quite the happening. Reminds you of just Who is in charge of the earth's affairs...

The other thing that happened was the invention of a very important item that we all use every day. This was in 18 something (oops, forgot to write that down). Anyway, the table that knew it got to go first today. The answer was perforated toilet paper. Now you have been informed.

Del Lake led the flag salute and Tom asked the blessing. Our volunteer helpers included Pam H., Sharon T., Gwynne W., Carlos B., and Chris & Theresa K. Thanks to all for all you do. The only announcement was that we had such a good time at the yard sale last week, we decided to join the Prairie City Community Yard Sale and do it again!

Our great cooks, Pam W. and Pam G., made sweet and sour meatballs over rice, with baked beans and a fruit salad. To top it off was coconut cream pie!

Wowser, dowser was it ever good! The sponsor for today is John Coombs. Thanks so much for your donation.

For those of us who "work" the yard sale, it is a lot of fun to go through the items that have been donated. "Ooh, look at this!" as opposed to "What is that?!" Then there are the comments: "That's your color!" and "That's your size!" I'm pleased to report that we were the recipients of lots of good stuff! Thanks to all who donated to the cause. We appreciate it very much.

We have had lots of activity on Highway 26 through our little burg. My, it takes a lot of street marking and workers to get the (I'm assuming) fiber optic cable from one end of town to the other. Since I'm not online, I assume that it won't have any effect on my life. A group of ladies were trying to access a certain program last night to watch together and the program just wouldn't work properly. We blamed it on the Ditch-Witch digging through Front Street. Tee-hee!

Ephesians 1:4 "For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight."

2 Peter 3:13 "So then, dear friends, ... make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him."

John Day Seniors

Elise Huskey



First and foremost is to remember all the people who volunteer to make our senior center successful. The cooks and cooks helpers and others who volunteer to do dishes and

cleaning in the kitchen. The people who deliver meals to those who cannot get out to do things for themselves, and the drivers' helpers also. The people who clean our building so we can have a sanitary environment to meet in. The ones who work on the outside of the building to make it attractive so we can be proud of our setting. This week we had Dale Stinnett and Darron Huskey pulling weeds, etc.; thanks to both of you. The people who sit on the board of directors to make sure business is taken care of and manage the maintenance of the building and entrances and parking lot. The ones that help with the greeting of meal attendees and those who help serve food and clean up after meals. The ones who lead in flag salutes and prayers. The organizers of all the different duties and events of the center. And my brain goes on and on because there are more than that who do tasks and give their time to do other things, like writing this news article for instance, and others who decorate the building and then the library, oh Linda does a wonderful job with our library. Her efforts are outstanding. Be sure to check our library out. Goodness, there are more, too, but as you can see it goes on and on. Our senior center cannot exist without our volunteers so thank all of you that participate to make it work. We just cannot thank you enough.

Monday, May 16, Darlene Nodine and Carol Roe were at the desk to greet all the lunch attendees and make sure everyone had their name in the can for the drawings. Darlene was the announcer, Maya Ennis led the flag salute and Dale Stennett asked the blessing. The Living Word Church members were the servers and cleanup crew (Carolyn Stout and M. Coombs). Thank you, ladies, for your time and efforts and all your smiles and friendly conversations. We had meatloaf, cheesy potatoes, corn medley and carrot cake. Great lunch. Thanks, Shay and

Kim. Sixteen people were in attendance to partake of this meal, and I forgot how many takeouts there were.

The meal was sponsored by Marilyn Foss in memory of Wayne. Kay Cotham won the Len's certificate, and Darlene Nodine won the free meal.

Forty-three fresh meals and 28 frozen meals were delivered into our community by Mike and Patty Davis, members of the hospital auxiliary (Tina S. and Matthew), and members of the Living Word Church (Carolyn and Ms. Coombs). Thanks to all of you.

Thursday, May 19, Darlene and Carol were at the desk to greet everyone and get names in the drawing. Nancy Elliot led the flag salute and Delores Beldon (sp.?) asked the blessing. The Methodist Church members were our servers and cleanup crew. Thanks, all of you, for helping and caring. Forty-two fresh meals were delivered into our community by Linda and Dennis Dickenson, Jeanette Julsrud and Richie and Sandy Colbeth. Thank you all for caring enough about our community members to contribute of your time, gas and efforts to be of service to John Day residents and nearby folks.

The meal today was pot roast with wonderful gravy, mashed potatoes with more gravy, green beans, and German chocolate cake. A meal to die for, as some would say. Thanks, Shay and Kim.

We had guests today from Valley View Retirement Home. It was so nice to see all of you today, six residents (one man surrounded by five lovely ladies, what a deal for him, ha). Kim and Janet were helping each one in and out of the People Mover and into the building and seeing that each one got a meal. It was great to see all of them today, and I am sure it was great for each of them to get out for a bit and see other people. I surely enjoyed all of them.

Some people are loaded down with weeds this year with all our rain. Rain seems troublesome to some folks, but we need it so much so we will just deal with the weeds. It provides some exercise for a positive note.

I will be north of Seattle this next week, coming home June 1. Watch this space for news about events that will be over by then. *Proverbs 3:26 The Lord will keep you safe. He will NOT let you fall into a trap. (This is great news).*

Monument Seniors

Soo Yukawa



I hope no one showed up for Tuesday lunch for we did not have lunch. It felt weird not having to plan on going to lunch at the senior center. We all had to fend for ourselves! Ha.

We are hoping lunch will resume as normal on the 24th.

Well, I, along with some other women, painted the senior center kitchen. Everything that could be moved was moved out and we were painting the walls. I told Jan Ensign they might have to fire me because I've never really painted before and I was dribbling paint everywhere and making a mess! Jan said they would not fire me. I don't think she noticed the dribbled paint on the floor.

We thank all the folks who came out to move things, cleaned, painted, and helped out at the fixing-up of our senior center. The work done would not have been possible without the help of everyone who volunteered.

There have been some pretty sunny and warm days, but I am not easily fooled anymore. I just patiently wait for the 1st of June. I am not even tempted in the least to try and plant something yet. Sure enough, when we thought it was so warm, some freaky weather came in and it was windy, cold, hailing, sunny, and rainy all rolled up into one funky day.

I am not looking forward to weed-whacking some areas that

have massive amounts of grass and weeds. I look at it and it looks like a daunting task. Sigh. Too bad the goats are sometimes naughty and eat what you don't want them to eat and don't eat what you want them to eat!

I have some good news, though: The wild plum seeds that I have planted are coming up! I think I have like 20 of them. I gave four away already and will give away some more. They are only about 2 inches tall. It is exciting to see new life coming out. I am amazed how a little seed can grow into some big, tall tree and bear yummy fruit. God is a wonderful Creator. I also have two peach tree saplings coming up as well. I thought for sure those seeds were duds! Ha.

Shay and Kiki are growing up fast now. Kiki still follows me around, Shay not so much. I guess they are like human "kids" and become more and more independent. I am looking forward to some freedom in a month or so. Sheesh, having to bottle-feed "babies" is hard work!

I like to watch Shay and Kiki run around and play, skip, hop, and kick their hind legs in the air. It is pure joy and entertainment to watch them. It lifts up my spirit when I sit and pet them and scratch them. I really hope they will let me milk them when the time comes. No, I am not going to drink it, blech! I'm gonna make goat milk soap.

Matthew 24:29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

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