

BY
DONATION

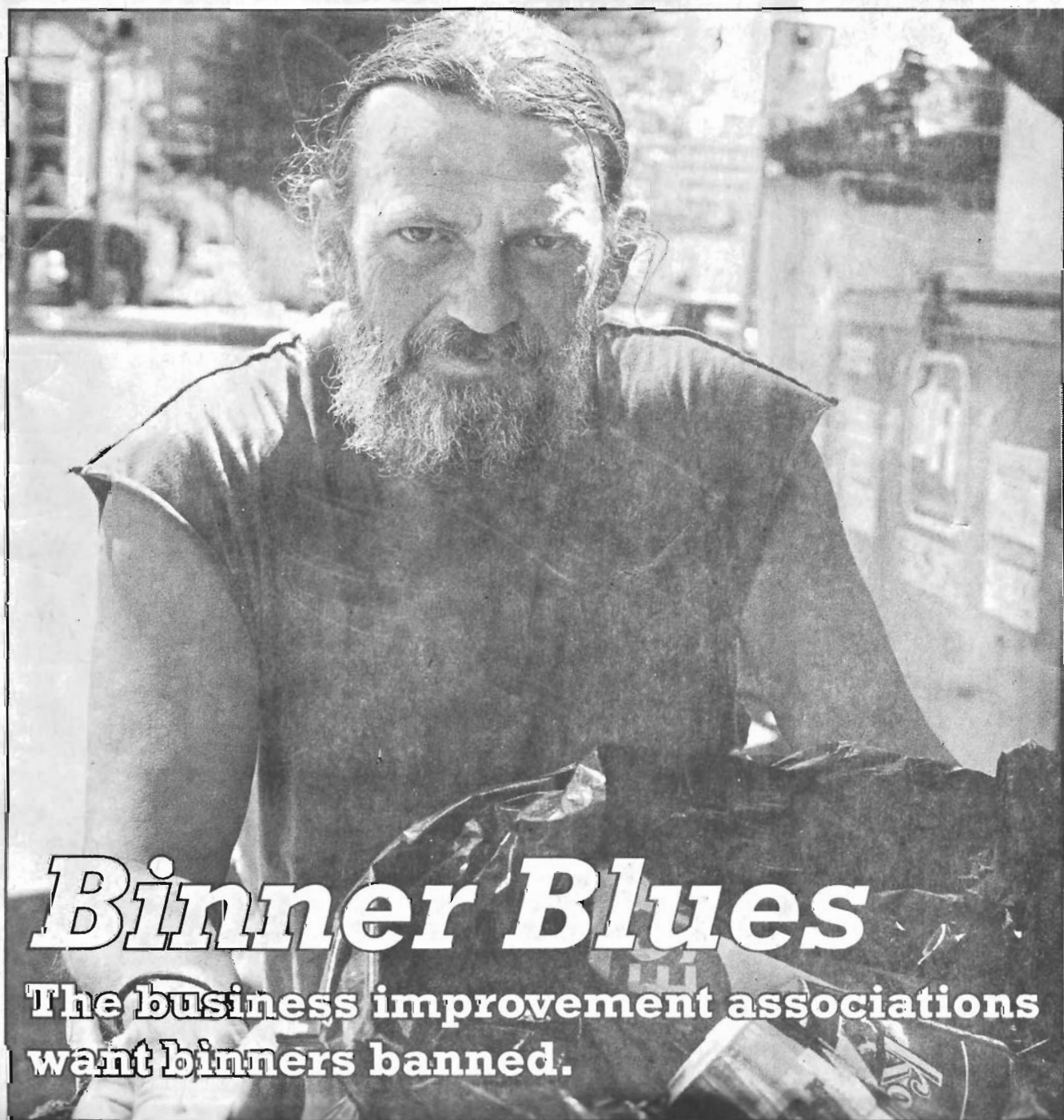
Street Corner

MARCH 15, 2007 VANCOUVER, BC FORTNIGHTLY

**Top Corporate
Music Bloopers**

**Flowers for
Algernon**

**Sudoku, Comics,
and a little bit more**



Binner Blues

**The business improvement associations
want bidders banned.**

Flower power

Budding bulbs help the homeless

By Sean Condon

Standing at the corner of Carrall Street and Expo Boulevard, TJ is carrying about a dozen colourful red roses in his hand as he looks to sell the flowers to anyone that drives by on their way home from work. While TJ is homeless, the flowers are in impeccable condition and would be indiscernible from any bouquet at a flower shop.

The flowers come from a new program in Vancouver called Flowers for Food, that saves healthy flowers from being thrown away and gives them to homeless people to sell on the street.

"[Flowers for Food has] helped me so much," says TJ, who has been homeless for 12 years. "There were times when I had no food for days and unless I wanted to stand in long food lines. I used to just have to scrimp and scrounge to survive."

Through the money that TJ has raised by selling flowers for donations, he has been able to buy himself a tent. He says the program has had immeasurable impact on his life.

"I can support myself now," he says. "I feel like more of an asset to society."

TJ, who suffers from dementia, became homeless when he moved to Vancouver from Kelowna and although he could find a place to stay, he prefers to sleep out on the street where it's safer and he won't be harassed. With the help of his friend, he had begun a system five years ago where he would collect discarded flowers and give them to people who gave him spare change.

Almost two years ago, TJ was spotted exchanging flowers for change by West End resident Marrett Green, who became compelled to help. After contacting a few flower shops Green found out that hundreds of flowers were being thrown out simply because they were too long, short, pale or lacking the proper number of petals. Six months ago he started Flowers for Food and collected the donated flowers for TJ to sell.



TJ sells fresh flowers on the corner of Carrall and Expo as part of FlowersForFood.com

"It's taking flowers that would be discarded and making use of them," says Green. "It's about making an effort to help provide an opportunity to people that may be in need of assistance."

Green collects between 2,000 to 3,000 flowers a week from Make Scents Flower Distributors, Kirby Floral Inc. and Action Floral Brokers, with the lion share going to TJ, who then distributes them to a few other vendors in the city. All profits go directly

into the pockets of the vendors. Green also gives a bulk of the flowers to Mom's Agape Street Ministry, which also runs a 'flowers for homeless' program. Mom's Agape is run by Ellen Shonsta, better known as "Mom" to many homeless youth in the West End. Her flower program has been running for years, but they have had to buy the flowers from the distributors.

For more information or to get involved visit FlowersForFood.com.