



Woody Peterson Discusses Backpack Bandits, Homelessness, East Alton Trustee Campaign

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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EAST ALTON - Woody Peterson has seen firsthand the devastating effects of homelessness on community members, including one man who suffered severe frostbite and has undergone multiple amputations. As the leader of local charitable group The Backpack Bandits and a volunteer at his local Overnight Warming Location, Peterson is now running for East Alton Trustee.

The Backpack Bandits have previously been involved in [community cleanup efforts and providing NARCAN to everyone from unhoused individuals to local police departments.](#)



Peterson said they've had an incredible year this past year with several other charity events that have taken place throughout the East Alton-Wood River area.

Unfortunately, the work Peterson does to help his community sometimes means seeing the worst case scenarios of homelessness up close and personal. He recently [told the](#)

[story on Our Daily Show! on Riverbender.com](#) of a homeless man in the Alton and East Alton areas known as “Bear” who has lost multiple extremities to severe frostbite.

“On this last cold spat, he was walking - and he is an older gentleman - and I guess he fell somehow and he couldn’t get up,” Peterson said. “He had to crawl back into his tent, ... he ended up getting frostbite on his hands and his feet, his legs - I mean, everything. Now they’ve amputated all of his fingers except for his thumbs, and then they just went in a couple days ago and removed from his calf down on his left . Tomorrow, they’re going in and removing his foot too - I mean this is an extreme case of frostbite.”

Peterson himself nearly had his arm amputated due to an injury he suffered a few years back - and while he didn’t end up losing the limb, he emphasized that the emotional buildup alone can take a toll on anyone. He added that while there are several local organizations lending a helping hand, such as the Overnight Warming Locations and Riverbend Family Ministries, it still remains a challenge getting the word out about these services to those who need them most.

While Peterson isn’t sure what the perfect solution is to the homelessness issue, he did share his perspective on a few things going on in the surrounding area. While he preferred to save the deep-dive policy discussions for closer to the election, he did say he believes the Warming Locations are a more effective use of money than continuous amputations.

“Is it cheaper for us to put him in a warming center for 12 hours, or is it cheaper to go amputate 20 body parts that’s going to cost hundreds and hundreds of thousands?” Peterson said. “People want to bitch about taxes raising if you open up a warming center, but now we’re spending this much money on removing his body parts?”

Unfortunately, “Bear” isn’t the only homeless person Peterson knows of in the local area who’s undergone amputation due to frostbite. He recalled a specific case older than Bear’s in which a man “lost half of his hand.” For those who learn about their availability in time, the Overnight Warming Locations can provide life-saving shelter and warmth to those who need it, individuals who Peterson added often struggle with drug addiction and mental health issues.

To lend his experience and expertise towards helping his community with these issues and more, Peterson is throwing his hat into the race for East Alton Trustees. He said he plans to file his official paperwork soon for the local consolidated elections taking place in about a year.

“If I would happen to win I win, if I lose I lose,” Peterson said. “I’m not going to stop working for the homeless ... I’m not going to change.”

For more of Peterson's perspective on his volunteer work, local issues, his campaign, and more, check out the full interview with Peterson at the top of this story or on Riverbender.com/video.