

# The Daily News (Nanaimo)

Protesters are just regular folks; Occupy Nanaimo: 'I stay because I want to create a solution. I'm around people here that are passionate who want to create solutions.'

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Page: A1 / Front

Section: News

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Illustrations: [Chris Koehn, Daily News] / Brent O'Brien, a carpenter from Gabriola Island, takes part in the Occupy Nanaimo movement each day after work, saying he hopes the effort will have a positive effect on local homelessness.; / ORUM;

While Occupy Nanaimo organizers wrap up the nightly general assembly, Brent O'Brien stubs out his cigarette and gets to work.

The protest camp at Diana Krall Plaza is unlike construction sites that O'Brien and many other carpenters are used to. Instead of worklights, O'Brien uses the ambient light from the library windows and the few sodium lights that dimly illuminate the brick plaza.

There are no foremen to oversee the work, only curious protesters who wander past inquiring about the nature of his project.

O'Brien has already put in a day's work and now he is taking the time to build a shelter for the homeless that stream in to Diana Krall Plaza at night in search of a warm place to sleep and maybe grab a cup of coffee.

He's like many other protesters in the square, each with their own reasons for occupying downtown. O'Brien comes each night to the plaza after work to bring about positive environmental change, but in doing so he is also taking up banners for other causes. By giving folks a dry place to rest, O'Brien makes a positive impact on

the homeless of Nanaimo.

Like him, many others are coming down after work or class to listen to what is being said and to help in whatever way they can.

Some have put their lives on hold to occupy the plaza.

While city officials have said that the protests cannot go on indefinitely, occupiers are making the best of their time.

"I've been here every night, however, I've not been able to stay every night. I'm a working man," said O'Brien.

He's here because he believes that something positive will come from the collective occupation in cities across the world.

"I stay because I want to create a solution. I'm around people here that are passionate who want to create solutions and I want to be here when they come up with a good idea," he said.

He lines up some two-by-two lumber into the skeleton of large wall that will later be covered with plastic to protect people from the elements. A light rain falls while he

hammers away.

The common misconception is that Occupy Movement protesters are unemployed people wasting their time, but that's not true, O'Brien says.

"We're professionals or aspiring professionals down here," he said. "A lot of people here are educated, well-meaning people." He is optimistic that the movement will bring about sustainability. Simply being there will raise awareness and that can only mean good things for the environment, he said.

"The city and the police are here showing their goodwill, so I think that they're susceptible to this message. If I have success and connect with them and others see me having success it will empower them to have success in their own world," he said. Amanda Orum and Curtis Reiersen are here also because they sense something different about this protest. They have been staying at the plaza with their three children, Leland, Trevor and Nathan since Sunday. Reiersen is a self-employed tradesman. He's been laying floors for 18 years, but has had trouble finding work after taking some time off to go on an extended camping trip with his family this summer.

The idea was to save some money while camping and pay off some debt. Reiersen wasn't eligible for parental leave, even though he has a four-month old child, because he was self-employed.

"A lot of people are ending up on hard times because of bad luck," Orum said. "We put our lives on hold. If this is the revolution then we're taking the time to be part of it. I am seeing the downfall of small

business, so we are here to stand up for that and to get rid of the corrupt corporate sector," Orum said.

Kris Budzinski trucks in meals created fresh from his kitchen at home each night. He's the unofficial camp cook and has been there since day one. Like O'Brien, Budzinski returns home each night so he can work in the morning. After that he spends the rest of his time at the plaza helping out and decrying rampant corporate greed.

Budzinski manufactures custom countertops and has never taken part in a protest.

"I'd like to see people get better treatment in their workplace," he said. "I'm one of the lucky ones.

My boss treats his employees very well and he pays a decent wage, but that's not the case everywhere."

O'Brien continues his work on the shelter while someone provides background guitar music. The occupation might not last much longer as upcoming events in the plaza may prompt the city to have the protest removed.

However, O'Brien is focused on providing a dry space for the needy for the time being.

"This has never happened before. Why not seize the moment?" he said.

## OCCUPY NANAIMO

15,800 renters on Vancouver Island needed subsidies last year.

300+ people spent Thanksgiving at St.  
Paul's Anglican free dinner.

6,600+ Canadians lost their jobs this  
September.

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