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PANHANDLER GIVES HIS TWO CENTS

Hearne Christopher Jr.

Missing in action at last week's City Hall panhandling parley: Jerry Mazer, the actual dude whose 96 lawsuit ended the last, questionably constitutional, decades-old Cowtown ban on alms solicitation.

"I didn't even know about that meeting," Mazer says.

And you never know how someone might respond to a panhandler.

"I met Sarah McLachlan, the singer -- she was very rude to me," Mazer says. "She was walking her dog on the Plaza, and she told me to get a life."

On the flip side of that rude rub, KC Mayor Kay Barnes: "She was nothing but nice to me."

By Mazer's measure, the magicians and musicians who work the streets alongside the panhandler crowd have it easy. Some of the performers who testified last week noted that they were more or less retired or held other jobs. There's more to the panhandling racket than meets the eye, Mazer says.

"I meet people, and they become my friends," he says. "The money's not the best thing about it; it's the people I meet. Like I met (former Chiefs coach) Dick Vermeil, and he gave me a dollar. The cops told me if I d have called him coach, he d have given me \$100."

Ever score any alms off Chiefs honcho Carl Peterson? "I don't want to comment on Carl Peterson," Mazer says.

What about the talk that Mazer is living large -- as opposed to being **homeless**?

"Some people think I've got a wife and four kids, and I've got a Mercedes-Benz and live in Mission Hills," Mazer says. "They're wrong -- I don't even have a car -- I take the bus. I only have two pair of jeans; some of the cops even think I'm rich. I live in a little house on the east side of town; I rent it."

Any love life? "Nope," he says. "The last time I had something romantic going on I can't even remember that. I don't have the time, and I don't have the money to take women out on dates."

Weirdest panhandling experience: "This guy gave me a hundred dollar bill by Barnes & Noble. Then a couple weeks later he drives by and gives me another \$100 -- and he did it three or four times. Then somebody told him I was a scam artist, and now when he drives by he throws batches of change at me. Sometimes it's \$2, sometimes \$5 -- I think he hates me because of the way he throws it and says, Pick it up and go eat. "

Mazer's law

The proposed KC panhandling ordinance would prohibit panhandling from 5 p.m. to 7 a.m. weekdays and all day Saturday and Sunday on the Plaza, downtown, Westport and Zona Rosa. Should the ordinance pass, Mazer is ready to take it on in court again -- providing he can find a lawyer to take up the cause.

"I think it violates my constitutional rights, my First Amendment right to use my mouth to ask somebody for the solicitation of an alm," Mazer says. "That's my livelihood. And it violates my constitutional right to gather at a particular spot -- my freedom of assembly -- that's two constitutional rights." Mazer thinks the inclusion of Zona Rosa and Westport is a smokescreen for the real targets: the Plaza and downtown.

"I've never even heard of anybody panhandling at Zona Rosa," he says. "Panhandling used to be good in Westport, but now I wouldn't even tackle Westport at any time of the day."

By Mazer's measure, there are enough panhandling hassles now. "Downtown those people in yellow suits think they're police officers," he says. "I think they take their job too seriously."

On KC's crown jewel, the Plaza: "I think they've got too much money and they want to be snooty and put people in jail for hardly anything."

Heard on the street...

Killers alert: Coming to a City Market concert near you -- would you believe? -- the Killers, on May 11. Just one problem: The show is slated to go down the day before a sure-to-be-packed Fall Out Boy concert at Verizon. Back-to-back, must-see outdoor alt rock shows in the monsoon month of May. Umbrella anyone?

Heard in the Phog ...

Ask and you shall receive: There's no shortage of commercial endorsements going down in Allen Fieldhouse these days. Like the Gatorade announcer schmooze during Sunday's thrilling double overtime KU women's basketball win over rival K-State.

"Gatorade: It's in the Kansas Jayhawks. Is it in you?" bellowed the PA system voiceover. "No!" the crowd thundered in response. No boo birds were heard, though, after an announcement that the "Rock chalk" ringtone is available from Cingular.

Have something to say? Call the tipline at (816) 234-4441 or e-mail hearne@kcstar.com.