

# St. Petersburg Times

## Alma Pertee [EAST Edition]

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### Document Text

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Alma Pertee is likely to smile and hug a person she meets. She is happy now, but she wasn't always.

Pertee, 53, said she had been on drugs for 52 of her years, starting when she took drugs for epileptic seizures.

She recites their names as if labeling a bunch of bad dreams: dilaudid, phenobarbital, reefer, blues, powder cocaine, powder heroin, crack. Sometimes she was married, sometimes not. Sometimes she stayed on the streets. She was arrested for drug offenses, begging for money, soliciting for prostitution.

"But through it all, thank God, I'm alive to share this message with someone who needs help as much as I did," Pertee said.

Crediting people at ASAP (a drop-in center at 323 11th Ave. S), clergy members and good friends with helping her off the streets, Pertee has become a kind of minister herself.

She works at ASAP, helping out in various ways: kitchen duties, seeing to it that people who come in get a snack and some clean clothes.

"I help feed and clothe the homeless. Every once in a while I give 'em money. I dress most of the women that come in here," she said.

"I'm also in the process of opening a pantry, called Here to Help Mission," she said.

Pertee, with the help of many pals, she said, has grabbed the first rung of the ladder and pulled herself up. Her last arrest, for violation of probation stemming from an old soliciting charge, happened in November.

She was working off 300 hours community service time when she met ASAP director Karen Butler, Pertee said.

"I have been pleased to work here with the director and counselors," she said.

Born in Sarasota, reared in Ocala, she came to St. Petersburg in 1991. She said her time at ASAP has helped her stabilize her life.

She lives in a rented garage apartment in Bartlett Park, less than a mile from ASAP. A Social Security allotment provides her income.

She believes it is possible for others to take successful steps.

"Sad to say, a lot people homeless, it's because of themselves. They have no self-esteem, they have drug habits, they have panhandling habits," Pertee said.

"Once they come to the knowledge of what they can do with the support of someone, it wouldn't be like that."

**[Illustration]**

Caption: PHOTO, SCOTT KEELER - Times: Alma Pertee, 53, wipes a tear away as she talks about her days on the streets when she was a crack addict and a prostitute. She used to hang out near apartments at 650 22nd Ave. S, shown in the background. "Lord have mercy, those were bad days," she says. PHOTO, SCOTT KEELER - Times: A whole new life: Alma Pertee abandoned drugs and prostitution to help other people like herself. "I thank Jesus for how far I've come today," she says. (Ran Page 3, Neighborhood Times)

Credit: SPECIAL REPORT: HOMELESS IN PINELLAS; Times Staff Writer

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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PHOTO, SCOTT KEELER - Times: Alma Pertee, 53, wipes a tear away as she talks about her days on the streets when she was a crack addict and a prostitute. She used to hang out near apartments at 650 22nd Ave. S, shown in the background. "Lord have mercy, those were bad days," she says. PHOTO, SCOTT KEELER - Times: A whole new life: Alma Pertee abandoned drugs and prostitution to help other people like herself. "I thank Jesus for how far I've come today," she says. (Ran Page 3, Neighborhood Times)

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