

# Rooms for Peace connects travelers and hosts to raise money for charity

By Charity Prater



John Brown explains the idea behind the newly formed nonprofit Rooms for Peace at a meeting held in April. — Photo by Charity Prater

Tears begin to form in John Brown's eyes as he reflects on the events leading up to his decision to start the Portland non-profit Rooms for Peace. He recalls being at a seminar and having to answer the question "What did you do to help change the world?"

His answer is still forming as he and others work to build Rooms for Peace from the foundation up.

"I decided to start this non-profit so I can do my part in creating a sustainable world that is socially just and spiritually fulfilling," says Brown, "I want to give my wellbeing to the kindness of strangers."

The non-profit will give travelers a choice to stay in the homes of participating hosts and pay a discounted price for lodging. Hosts and travelers will donate part of the discounted lodging cost to a charitable organization of their choice; the rest will go to support Rooms for Peace. Thousands of dollars in traveling expenses will be directed to non-profits.

"I thought of this idea when I was hitchhiking through Europe and was offered a place to stay in Portugal," says Brown, "The kindness and generosity that I experienced was unimaginable, even to me. I could still be living there today if I wanted."

Brown wanted to repay his hosts for their kindness; instead, he was instructed to return the favor to others.

Rooms for Peace started with an April "barn raising" at Lion and the Rose bed-and-breakfast in Northeast Portland.

Approximately 50 people attended, agreeing to support the program with donations of time, money and skill.

"We want people to be excited about this opportunity and help us raise the barn," says Brown. "The barn is a metaphor for all the elements we need to make this non-profit functional and sustainable."

Room for Peace currently has five board members, including board director Kraig Brockschmidt, who is building a Web site that will connect hosts and travelers.

Hosts and travelers pay a \$15 registration fee, pick a Rooms for Peace-screened charity of their choice and use the Web site to match up their travel needs. Travelers talk with hosts by phone before arrival and write reviews on their stays upon departure. Rooms for Peace expects to have many of its services available to the public by late 2008.

"Charitable organizations will be fully screened," says Brockschmidt. "The non-profit money will go to support the environment, youth, peace, shelters and others."

Kate Swabey attended the "barn raising" event.

"I thought that it was a brilliant idea," says Swabey. "I love the idea of meeting people who share my same values and redirecting money toward peace for additional community value."

For more information about Rooms for Peace, visit <http://www.roomsforpeace.org/> or call John Brown at (503) 282-5497. ★