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'Zetaman' fights homelessness with courage, sacrifice, cool costume

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PORTLAND, Ore.- It's another dark, damp night in Portland, and for many homeless people, the bloom is off the City of Roses as they shiver out another night of unseasonably cold temperatures under bridges, in doorways and on park benches.



In what many consider the bad part of town, one man steps from the shadows, armed with a stun gun, a collapsible baton, an ear-piercing air horn and pepper spray. A large white "Z" covers his tight-fitting shirt, and he steps through puddles in thick black boots.

A full-length black overcoat, fingerless black gloves, skull and crossbones belt buckle and dark goggles complete his "intimidating" outfit.

His name is Zetaman, and he's looking for homeless people.

When he spots a group of transients, he makes his move.

"Do any of you folks need extra gloves or anything," Zetaman asks the group as he pulls items from a backpack.

To homeless people, Zetaman is not a threat. He's a hero, maybe even a superhero. And his fame is spreading.



Zetaman, whose real identity is a secret, is packing gloves, sandwiches and other items that will give some homeless Portland residents a degree of comfort on a cold night. The other items are for self-defense. Every superhero needs a utility belt.

Zetaman says he is not really a superhero, but he does take his cues from the superheroes in the comic books he loves.

"I like Superman and I like Zorro so I thought, 'Wow, combine the two,' " Zetaman told



KATU News on a night when we tagged along as he handed out food and clothing items to the homeless.

He has also given up buying his beloved comics in order to finance his good works on Portland's streets. Some of the money goes directly into the hands of the homeless.

"I want to help because I grew up poor and I grew up starving and stuff," Zetaman said. "I'm an adult now, I have a job and I just want to help where I can."

One homeless man received a pair of gloves to ward off the cold. Others gratefully accepted chicken sandwiches. More and more, Zetaman is receiving recognition. He has an [audio blog](#), [MySpace page](#) and [several videos of his exploits](#) have turned up on YouTube.

Citizens pose for cell phone camera photos with Zetaman, and homeless people reach out to shake his hand and thank him.

"I think anyone who wants to go in this community and do good work, more power to them." says one man who gives Zetaman a hearty high-five. "I love you, Zetaman, you rock," he says.



The costume didn't seem unusual to another admirer. "Looks like a normal every-day goth so it's kind of cool," the man said. In a city known for "weird," Zetaman doesn't turn too many heads, at least not any more.

"I don't wear a mask or a cape. I tried that the first time and got in trouble with police so as of that, never again," Zetaman says of his initial foray into citizen crime fighting.

"I really don't want to die or anything," he says, explaining how he shifted to helping the homeless. Now, he's becoming part of Portland lore.

Zetaman [is not alone](#) in his endeavors. In other cities across the nation, other self-made superheroes have stepped up to fight crime, help the homeless or contribute their own special brand of civic improvement.

They have names like Apocalypse Meow, Phantom Zero and Agent Null.

Zetaman says he's met with some of these other solo civic social fighters and an alliance may

be in the works.

"I'm not really a superhero because I don't have any powers or anything," Zetaman says as he continues his rounds, looking for more people to help.

The buzz on the meaner streets of Portland says otherwise.

Perhaps, one day, there may even be a Zetaman comic book.

