

# F O C U S

## More homeless seeking refuge in local shelter

### Down-on-their-luck share stories of better times gone by

By Beth Tatum  
Assistant Features Editor

In busy rush hour traffic, she stands on the exit ramp. She looks ragged — big, floppy shirt, cigarette hanging out of her mouth, a layer of dirt on her face. But she's young, in her upper 20s. She holds a sign: "HOMELESS. HUNGRY. WILL WORK FOR FOOD." Most of the cars just drive on by without stopping.

This woman is just one of the many homeless people in the Triangle. Many turn to the Inter-Faith Council emergency shelter for a good meal and a place to stay.

Every guest has a story to tell. Just before 11 a.m., in time for lunch, the guests wander into the community kitchen and wait patiently for a lunch of hot dogs, mixed vegetables and cake with chocolate icing.

One of the guests named Lee sat at the clean, white table with his half-eaten lunch in front of him, yellow baseball cap pulled down. He said that in times past he had stood by the road with a sign in his hand, too.

"It paid for my gas, car insurance and these shoes," he said, holding up one foot. "It's just one of the ways I exist. People don't have to roll down their windows. They could go right on by," he said.

And the results have been pretty good for him. "I didn't realize people were so friendly. Some people will give you food. A lot of students will talk to you."

Lee had been at the shelter for close to a week. According to IFC rules, he could stay only one more week unless he filed for an extension.

#### Back again

But this is not Lee's first time at the shelter. Last year, he stayed there on and off for about three or four months. "Last year, I moved to Carboro and used the shelter to get started," the 56-

year-old said. "I only ate dinner here. I could have stayed, but I had a truck and used it as a camper. I don't like to be crowded in."

Eventually, he found a job as a caretaker for a house that was to be sold.

The owners said he could live there until it was sold, but it was never bought. Instead there was a problem with the sewer lines, and the house was condemned.

"So I'm out of a place to live," Lee said. "I'm looking for another deal."

In the meantime, he has been living at the shelter full time because he has since sold his truck and gotten a smaller car.

"It's not as bad as I thought it would be," he said. "I have control. There are two TV rooms, and I can work outside."

Lee said he was hoping the shelter would give him some tools so he could help out by doing maintenance and pulling weeds at the shelter.

"I would like to do something to pay them back for the food and shelter," he said.

#### A Jack of all trades

Being handy with tools is all a part of Lee's various occupational background. You name it, he's probably done it.

Originally from upstate New York, Lee started out as an assistant baker. Later, he drove a cab but gave it up to take care of a paraplegic girl who lived with her 80-year-old grandmother.

When it was time to move on, Lee wandered down to West Palm Beach where he worked as an assistant manager of a Goodwill store.

Then, Lee said he got a "brilliant" idea.

He got a job traveling around with the fair. He became a wagon master and found that the job was too much for him. Working 80 hours a week and traveling constantly, Lee decided it was time to settle down, so he moved to Chapel Hill.

Lee said his main specialty was bi-

cycle repair and that was what he was looking for a job in now — either that or another caretaker job.

But he can remember a time when he lived in Connecticut and had an apartment, a new car and his own business.

"I drove a Cadillac then," he recalled. "That's the way my life has been — up and down."

Lee has lived most of his recent life alone. He no longer has any family. He was the youngest child, and his parents and all three of his brothers have died.

"I was kind of the tail end," Lee mused. "I sometimes think my family was what kept me going."

#### A day at the shelter

Like Lee, Delores, another guest at the shelter, recently has been forced out of a job. Until the end of May, Delores worked in Rose's, stocking shelves and working in the men's and women's dressing rooms.

"I really liked my job a lot," she said. "I had no trouble getting along with people."

She said she was fired because she couldn't find a way to work. "I always caught the bus to work. It just doesn't run on holidays. If I had known he was going to fire me, I would have saved up for a taxi. But a taxi is \$8 both ways."

Delores now spends her days job hunting. A week after she arrived at the shelter, she was hoping to land a job at UNC Hospitals and was planning to call back about it.

She said being in the shelter wasn't bad. "It's pretty nice around here. You get up real early. You think since you don't have a job, you get to sleep later. No, you can't. We get up at 6."

After rising early, Delores said she dresses and heads downstairs for breakfast at 6:30 a.m. Then she reads, goes for a walk or checks on a job.

Eight p.m. is the curfew unless Delores calls in to say she is working. A daily shower is required for anyone who stays at the shelter, which can be

done before lights go out around 10:30 p.m.

#### Not giving up

Time is of the essence to Delores because not only does she have to find a job before her two weeks at the shelter run out, but she also needs to raise \$50 before the end of the month to get her things from storage. If she doesn't get the money, all of it will be thrown away.

"There are pictures of my family in there," she said. "I sure don't want to get rid of those."

Among her belongings are pictures of her father, who died nine years ago of cancer. "It's hard to believe he's dead," she said. Delores also lost her only sister to cancer. She does, however, have a brother.

"Two years ago, I stayed with my brother in Pittsboro, but he acted like he owned me. He and his wife were separated, and he thought the guy I was going with was the same guy (that broke up his marriage). One night he made a threat to my life."

"A friend told me to call the sheriff, but he couldn't do anything." Finally, social services sent someone to help find a place for Delores to stay.

Aside from her brother, Delores has three children to call family. Her youngest son is living in Winston-Salem and will be going into the Army next month. Her other son is in the process of coming out of the Marines and moving to Texas.

"He was in Saudi Arabia, so he was lucky to come back alive," she said. "I hated to hear the news every night."

Delores also has a daughter living in Maryland. "She's working her way through college," she said. "She's going to be a lawyer. She says she's going for the big money."

In the meantime, Delores is still job hunting and keeps her hopes up.

"I'm not giving up," she said. "I'm going to keep checking up. I hope something will soon open up."



DTH/Jim Farniga

Chris McDonough, a classics graduate student, mashes potatoes at the Inter-Faith Council shelter. Volunteers from his department work at the kitchen once a month.

## IFC opens doors to those without homes

By Kristin Leight  
Staff Writer

In late May, Delores lost her job at Rose's, her only means of income.

When she couldn't pay the rent three weeks ago, her landlord evicted her, and she joined the growing ranks of America's homeless.

But Delores isn't among those living in a cardboard box or sleeping on a park bench.

In fact, for the past two weeks she has enjoyed a soft bed, plentiful food and hot showers at 100 W. Rosemary St.

This red brick edifice, which was once Chapel Hill's municipal building, now houses the Inter-Faith Council for Social Service's community shelter and kitchen, serving the homeless and hungry of the area.

IFC is a non-profit, volunteer-run organization supported by 40 Chapel Hill and Carboro congregations, the United Way, municipal governments, businesses and community individuals.

The shelter was started seven years ago when five homeless people slept on mats in a community church's fellowship hall.

After operating out of several IFC congregations for two years, the shelter moved to its present location and now accommodates approximately 50 people per night. The kitchen feeds these guests and any other people needing a meal.

Chris Moran, community services manager of the shelter since 1987, said the shelter has served all different types of people — older adults, women and children, young married couples, substance abusers and people with medical problems.

"They're normal people, just like you and me, except that they were a paycheck away from being homeless," he said.

The shelter provides guests with bedding, personal care kits, clothing and meals. They also have the opportunity to receive medical care at the facility three times per week.

Guests generally are permitted to stay at the shelter for two weeks but may apply for an extension.

The "House Rules" tacked up on the walls set the tone for the shelter.

It is clean and orderly. Men and women are divided by floors, with the men in bunks on the sleeping porches upstairs and the women and children downstairs.

The arrangement gives it the feel of a camp or dormitory, and Delores said,

"It's easy to make friends here."

Delores has only one complaint about the shelter. "I would like to sleep later," she said, laughing.

To encourage guests to look for work and housing, one of the rules is they must leave the sleeping floors by 7 a.m. In addition, mothers are required to find day care for their children so they can pursue job and housing opportunities.

"We also try to do some coaching to get them jobs and help them find housing," said Karen Cummins, a social worker that is at the shelter once per week. "Part of what we do is to get them believing in themselves again."

Volunteer social workers and social work students hold counseling sessions with guests and offer services such as taking them to the housing office.

Cummins said one volunteer recently took a suicidal guest to the emergency room and stayed with the person through the night. "We have some very dedicated volunteers."

More than 740 people volunteer either in the IFC kitchen or shelter. But Moran said they still needed more people to be involved.

There is a need for volunteers to serve as receptionists, to do computer work and to teach English to Spanish-speaking guests.

The shelter also needs female and male volunteers that will stay overnight once per month, and the kitchen needs groups to serve meals, Moran said.

Volunteers work three hours per week for at least six months. Students are asked to make at least a four-month commitment.

Volunteer Patt Lopp became involved at the shelter through her church and has worked there for a year and a half. "It really changes your opinion that the type of people who stay here are bums," she said.

"A lot of people here have had bad luck, lost their job and need to stay here until they get back on their feet."

The shelter serves as a temporary refuge for the homeless, Moran said, and should not be a permanent solution to the homelessness problem.

"We're here as a stop-gap measure because the government doesn't provide enough money in human services," he said. "We need more public money to go into affordable public housing."

"Nobody should have to stay in a homeless shelter."

To find out more about volunteer opportunities at the IFC community shelter and kitchen, call 967-0643.



DTH/Jim Farniga

Billy Galloway, Felicia Massey and her daughter Comina enjoy dinner Saturday at the Inter-Faith Council shelter on Rosemary Street

## Students HOPE for a better future

By Deepa Perumallu  
Staff Writer

Asking a typical on-the-go college student to skip a meal voluntarily might seem inconceivable, but for one day each year, the Hunger and Homelessness Outreach Project goes even further.

On the Thursday before Thanksgiving, the group encourages students to fast and donate the money they would have spent on breakfast, lunch or dinner to HOPE's annual contribution to the Oxfam America Project. Oxfam, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, is a grassroots, global organization dedicated to aiding the world's hungry.

"Oxfam is definitely one of our bigger projects," said HOPE co-chairwoman Shirley Liu. "It raises both awareness and money for the homeless."

Liu explained that a person either could simply fast for hunger awareness or enlist the support of others to sponsor their fast, much like the way a walk-a-thon works.

More than \$1,300 was raised last year by the campus and Chapel Hill community and sent to the national Oxfam office in Boston.

Campus Y director Zenobia Hatcher-Wilson credited the success of the Oxfam fast to the campuswide, not just studentwide, effort put into the project. "The chancellor sent letters asking

staff members to contribute," she said, "and money could be deducted from meal cards to facilitate the matter."

HOPE officially emerged as a Campus Y committee last year when the Hunger Awareness Committee and the Student Homeless Outreach Coalition combined because of the similarity of their goals.

The Campus Y has coordinated the Oxfam fast and other related projects for the homeless for the past 15 to 20 years, Hatcher-Wilson said. "The students just try to change the name every few years to get a better or more catchy sound."

The heart of HOPE lies at the Inter-Faith Council community shelter and kitchen, located on Rosemary Street, where volunteers typically spend three hours per week as desk monitors or receptionists, checking in people and chatting with them.

"I was really surprised at the number of kids there," said senior Robin

Broadnax, who devoted much of her shift to playing with incoming children.

Broadnax said she joined HOPE after passing by so many homeless people on Franklin Street alone. "It's hard not to help," she said.

"But, you know, a lot of people aren't homeless in the sense of not having anywhere to live at all. Some were just moving across the country and didn't have anywhere to go at the moment. It made me feel better to know they were actually going somewhere."

Junior and former co-chairwoman Sarah White agreed that the stereotypical image of a homeless person no longer applied. "Now it's whole families instead of individual people," she said. "Every case is different. And the worst is the 'working poor' — those people who work 9 to 5 and still can't afford a place to live."

Despite HOPE's commitment to the IFC shelter, Liu said its ultimate goal was to eliminate the need for shelters.

"Even though (the goal) is on the abstract or theoretical side of things, we have to take that first step of raising awareness about the problem," she said. "That's a lot of what HOPE is about — initiative, obligation and vision."

Liu stressed that following through on ideas was equally important. To ensure dedication, the shelter developed a new volunteering policy under which volunteers will be better trained and oriented in the area to which they dedicate their time.

HOPE also has participated in the Hunger Cleanup, a national project in which college students and young adults work with financial sponsors to raise funds for local and national groups.

"That dual focus is part of what sets HOPE apart from other service organizations, most of which are focused entirely on the national level or the local level," Hatcher-Wilson said.

Liu said: "Volunteering at the shelter opened my eyes to the problem. But even though it exposes you, you don't have a chance to resolve the problem."

"To be honest, I don't think I've made that great an impact. The impact was made on me. A lot of my experience was absorbing the environment."

"I can now take that knowledge and work to improve the situation."

A general interest meeting will be held Sept. 22 in the Campus Y lounge for students interested in joining HOPE.

#### THE FACTS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS:

- The American Red Cross estimates that 3 million people are homeless in the United States.
- The Chapel Hill IFC shelter housed 125 people in 1985. In 1991, 897 men, women and children stayed at the shelter.
- So far this year, 570 guests, 24 percent female and 76 percent male, have stayed at the shelter.
- Of the 570 served this year, 65 percent were new to the shelter. Forty percent were from Orange County.