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Inside This Issue

LOCAL NEWS

D.C. Councilmember Takes the Homeless 'Urban Plunge'

Marion Barry takes a one-night immersion course in homelessness, page 4

POETRY

Food For Thought

Dewayne Harrison riffs on current events, page 8

EDITORIAL

Poor, Black and a Veteran

Former vendor August Mallory is back from Seattle to express his views, page 12

IN OTHER NEWS

NYC Mayor Bloomberg's Plan to Reduce Homelessness Stalls

In 2004, Bloomberg announced a plan to cut homelessness by two-thirds, but the numbers of those in shelters hasn't changed, page 6

STREET NEWS SERVICE

A Two-Wheeled Revolution in Denver

A bike shop does its thing for the homeless, page 7

FICTION

The Homeless Traveler

Ivory Wilson's latest story is short, powerful and pure poetry, page 9

Advocates Honor Activist's Memory, Find Inspiration

By Mary Otto

Aug. 14 would have been Mitch Snyder's 65th birthday. A small white candle was lit and set near the curb at Thomas Circle before the brownstone church where his ashes are buried.

A small knot of friends, colleagues and admirers remembered the passionate activist who died in 1990 of an apparent suicide, after rising to national prominence as a spokesman for the homeless.

Recalling Snyder's fearless street-guerilla style, his penchant for tent encampments and coffin parades, they invoked his spirit for the struggles ahead.

"Mitch was so creative," recalled Mary Ann Luby, of the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless.

"This guy was some kind of awesome guy," said homeless activist Eric Sheptock, who, at 39, is part of a younger generation of advocates.

"The fight continues."

As Sheptock spoke, he held a sheaf of flyers concerning the scheduled Oct. 1 closure of the 300-bed Franklin School Shelter, just a few blocks south of Thursday's curbside service.

The evening before, Luby and Sheptock, a three-year Franklin resident, helped lead a meeting in a corner of Franklin Square Park near the embattled shelter. At the small

See **Franklin**, page 4



PHOTO BY CLIFF CARLE/STREET SENSE

Dozens of men line up to enter Franklin School Shelter. The shelter is slated to close Oct. 1, and many residents and advocates say there is not enough space at other shelters for all of the homeless men who will be displaced.

EDITORIAL

A New World, An Office

By Maurice King

It took me by surprise when a recruiter called me about a potential job opportunity at the end of June. What surprised me even more was how quickly the interview procedures passed. Within a week, I had been offered a job. I was given a week to decide if I wanted the position, but I didn't need that long. It was a good offer, so, naturally, I accepted it.

I really couldn't complain. At a very respectable salary, I would be working for an agency that was a short commute by bus or by Metro, whichever I chose. It was definitely the sort of work I have been trained to do.

My first day was sitting through an orientation at the firm's location in Reston, Virginia. During the orientation, the staff presented a film describing the firm's mission and goals, and discussed "the particulars," things like the company's benefits and how the new hires could register for them.

Although it was a six-hour affair that included lunch, provided by the firm, it wasn't too tiring of a day. The most difficult part was getting out to Reston and back riding on

See **Office**, page 12

Homeless Voters Question At-Large Candidates

By Robert Blair

A local organization that serves the poor and homeless found itself involved in politics recently.

The Father McKenna Center (FMC), a soup kitchen and day center located in the basement of St. Aloysius Church on North Capitol Street, hosted a candidate forum for homeless voters on Aug. 11.

A group of about 50 FMC clients and visitors, most of whom indicated by a show of hands that they were registered District voters,

listened to presentations by Carol Schwartz and Michael A. Brown, candidates for "at-large" seats on the D.C. Council.

Opening questions were directed to each candidate by Tom Howarth, the FMC director who organized the candidate forum, and then the floor was thrown open for additional questions from the prospective voters.

Carol Schwartz, a former special education teacher and four-time mayoral candidate who has served on the D.C. Council for many years,

arrived first and spoke with the audience for about 25 minutes. Moments after she departed, Michael Brown, a business lobbyist and 2006 candidate in the Democratic primary for mayor, arrived and addressed the group for about 15 minutes.

Schwartz spoke on several topics, including the proposed closure of the Franklin School Shelter on Oct. 1 and the need for more city investment in nonhousing services for the homeless.

Schwartz said that she was the council member who had origi-

nally discovered the reference in an administration economic analysis that indicated the mayor's intent to close the Franklin School Shelter and brought it to the attention of her colleagues.

In response to a question about Mayor Adrian Fenty's authority to close the Franklin Shelter without council approval, Schwartz explained that, although she didn't know if continuing to use the Franklin School as an emergency shelter was the best long-term use for the facility, she opposes closing it in Oc-

tober, at the beginning of the hypothermia season. "I will fight that," Schwartz declared.

"If we close Franklin at any time," she added, "plans need to be in place for alternative housing. There need to be sites found [for the displaced]."

Schwartz referred to claims that other city shelters would have adequate space for the men displaced from Franklin Shelter as "one of those pie in the sky things."

See **Voters**, page 5

StreetSense

1317 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: (202) 347-2006
Fax: (202) 347-2166
info@streetsense.org
www.streetsense.org

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Our Mission

Street Sense aims to serve as a vehicle for elevating voices and public debate on issues relating to poverty while also creating economic opportunities for people who are experiencing homelessness in our community.

Our Editorial Policy

Editorials and features in Street Sense reflect the perspectives of the authors. We invite the submission of news, opinion, fiction and poetry, hoping to create a means in which a multitude of perspectives on poverty and homelessness can find expression. Street Sense reserves the right to edit any material.

The Story of Street Sense

Street Sense began in August 2003 after two volunteers, Laura Thompson Osuri and Ted Henson, approached the National Coalition for the Homeless on separate occasions about starting a street newspaper in Washington, D.C.

A street paper is defined as a newspaper about poverty, homelessness and other social issues that provides an income to the homeless individuals who sell it. About 25 street papers operate in the United States and Canada in places like Seattle, Chicago, Montreal and Boston, and dozens more exist throughout the world.

After bringing together a core of dedicated volunteers and vendors, Street Sense came out with its first issue in November 2003, printing 5,000 copies. For the next three years the paper published consistently on a monthly basis and greatly expanded its circulation and vendor network.

For the first year, Street Sense operated as a project of the National Coalition for the Homeless, but in October 2004, the organization incorporated and moved into its own office space. In March 2005, Street Sense received 501(c)3 status, becoming an independent nonprofit organization.

In October 2005, Street Sense formed a board of directors, and in November, the organization hired its first employee, a full-time executive director.

A year later, in November 2006, the organization hired its first vendor coordinator.

In February 2007, the paper started publishing twice a month as the network of vendors expanded to more than 50 homeless men and women. To support the increased production, Street Sense brought on its first full-time editor in chief in April 2007.

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If you are interested in becoming a vendor, contact Rita Brunson at the same number or come to a vendor training session on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 2 p.m. at our office (1317 G Street, NW - near Metro Center).



Do you have comments on a story?

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Write to editor@streetsense.org

Thank You!

SERVICE PROFILE

New User-Friendly Interface Increases Access to Food

By Ben Edwards

As food prices increase, access to cheap food becomes crucial for D.C. residents. A new user-friendly interface, the DC Food Finder (www.dcfoodfinder.org), offers an online map to locate free meals, low-cost groceries and other sources of healthy food in Washington, D.C. communities.

Healthy Affordable Food for All (HAFA), a coalition of advocates, service providers and local food activists, created DC Food Finder.

Suzanne Henley, a child nutrition associate at DC Hunger Solutions, a member of HAFA, said the project began after she discovered a similar site based out of New York. “The need for a service like this in D.C. is very high,” Henley said.

On the site, options to select free meals, cooking classes, food assistance centers, farmers markets, and more, give users a slew of locations throughout the city to choose from. Nutrition and access are major themes on the site, as a major goal of the coalition is to encourage healthier eating habits among those who frequent restaurants and corner stores, as opposed to preparing meals themselves.

The increasing cost of food presents a challenge for D.C. residents, but the distribution rather than the overall food supply may be re-

sponsible. Communities with many grocery stores offer the cheapest food, while communities with sparse food offerings demand higher prices.

According to a report by DC Hunger Solutions, Wards 2 and 3 in the Northwestern part of the city have 1 food store for every 12,000 residents while Wards 7 and 8 have 1 food store for every 70,000 people. The same report reveals that 35,000 D.C. residents are at risk of hunger.

“The need for a service like this in D.C. is very high.”

— Suzanne Henley, child nutrition associate, DC Hunger Solutions

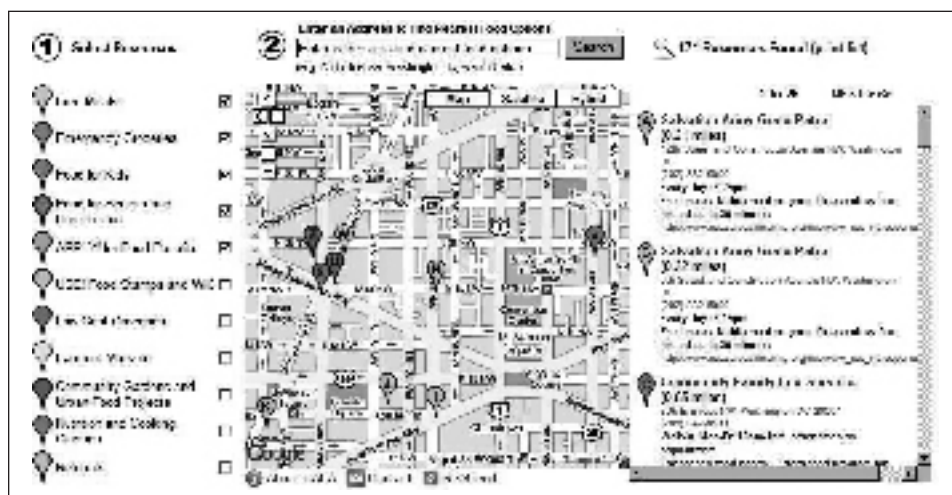
“Food insecurity and hunger bear many consequences. It can prevent children from reaching their full potential by stunting physical and mental development; and for the elderly, adequate nutrition is particularly important for health because of their increased vulnerability to disease,” according to a

2002 report released by the Administration on Aging.

Though the new tool increases access to food for residents with Internet access, the homeless often have the greatest need for food security but are least likely to have regular access to the Internet.

“We built the DC Food Finder so both moderately poor people with Internet access and those that interact with the homeless can locate inexpensive food,” Henley said. “We expect (homeless) shelters and kitchens will visit the site frequently,” she said.

“My hopes are that social workers and oth-



DC Food Finder maps are color-coded and users can zoom in and out to find food sources.

er coalitions will use this tool, and word will spread about the resources,” Henley said.

The DC Food Finder went live in early July and had 15,000 visitors in its first two weeks.

Access to affordable food may be just as important as access to healthy food. According to a 2005 study by the Trust for America’s Health, over half of all adults living in D.C. are overweight or obese. The DC Food Finder targets healthy food outlets, an approach that aids both hungry people and those suffering from obesity.

As food prices increase, healthy foods like vegetables bear most of the price increase. Much of the cost that goes into producing unhealthy foods like candy and chips includes processing costs. Increases in food prices are less likely to affect the cost of processing, which shields consumers from much of the

price hikes. As food becomes more expensive, resources that find cheap, healthy food becomes increasingly important as well.

“The outreach strategy (for the DC Food Finder) consists of distributing flyers and other material to local food banks and other food suppliers,” said Henley. “We’re not using any online tactics at this time,” she said.

HAFA will update the interface upon the request of food outlets, which helps the coalition that created the service avoid overlapping efforts to provide free and low-cost food.

While the DC Food Finder displays only food outlets inside D.C., proper, HAFA will consider expanding the tool to the D.C. metro area once it measures its success.

Craig Downs, a Street Sense intern, contributed to this article.

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Additional items that Street Sense needs:

- * Messenger and tote bags and backpacks for vendors
- * Digital video camera
- * Food for vendor meetings
- * Water bottles for vendors
- * Metro cards and bus tokens for vendor transportation
- * Office chairs
- * Laptop computers with at least Windows 2000 and 10 GB of storage space

Councilmember Takes the Homeless 'Urban Plunge'

By Jony Bell

Two decades ago, the National Coalition for the Homeless began hosting Urban Plunges for college students, who experienced 48 hours of life on the streets – sleeping, pan-handling and looking for their next meal away from the usual comforts of home.

Now, the program has challenged political candidates, incumbents and public officials to take a similar immersion course on homelessness.

On the night of Aug. 12, Ward 8 Councilmember Marion Barry accepted the Candidate Homeless Challenge and spent the night sleeping at the Catholic Charities 801-East Housing Assistance Center, a shelter in Southeast D.C.

While a participant certainly cannot experience homelessness entirely when a bed and food awaits back home, the challenge does offer new insights into the life of a person without a home – waiting in soup lines, walking great distances to access services, feeling 'invisible' to those not homeless. The challenge provides candidates time to interact with an often neglected component of their

constituency, becoming familiar with the social services network for homeless people and how homeless people survive.

And this is the type of experience the Ward 8 councilmember (and D.C. Housing Committee chair) had last Tuesday.

Seventy homeless men, along with staff from Catholic Charities, representatives from NCH (including NCH Speakers' Bureau member Steve Thomas) and members of Barry's campaign crammed into a small dining area to discuss the issues facing the residents of the shelter, as well as the homeless population across Washington, D.C.

Issues such as the lack of affordable housing, the criminalization of homelessness, voting, health care, a living wage, job training and attacks against the homeless – including physical beatings and discrimination – were all brought to the councilmember's attention

by the shelter residents.

And Barry seemed anxious to address the men's questions and concerns.

"I'm here to listen and learn. I'm not too proud to learn. And I'm not too proud to be here."

— Marion Barry, City Councilmember

"I'm here to listen and learn," he told the audience. "I'm not too proud to learn. And I'm not too proud to be here," he continued. "I hope my visit here will help to highlight this situation."

He told the men that the whole council – and certain members in particular – were sensitive to issues facing the homeless in D.C. But, he said, they should not rely exclusively on the shelter, the public officials and others respon-

sible for providing services. He urged them to play the biggest role in getting their own lives turned around to the point they wanted. The shelter residents were encouraged to come make their voices heard at the City Council hearings, as well as at the hearing Barry plans to hold in the fall regarding shelters and sub-

sided housing.

After nearly two hours of taking questions and having a candid discussion with the shelter's residents, the councilmember settled into his bed for the evening alongside the 60 or so other men in the dormitory who found themselves without a home that night.

In the morning, Barry also spoke with the residents as they had breakfast.

Steve Thomas, who spent two nights at this shelter about 18 months ago, was encouraged by the councilmember's visit. "My hat goes off to him. I think the guys [at the shelter] were very receptive to him being there."

Ultimately, Barry's was certainly not the most authentic homeless experience. His campaign team arrived with him, announcing to the entire shelter his impending arrival more than a day before he pulled into the parking lot in his personal vehicle. His advisors stayed close to the councilmember throughout, even helping to make his bed before he settled in. They left him only to go home for the few hours between bedding down and serving breakfast.

See **Plunge**, page 5

Franklin, from page 1

meeting, under the darkening sky, a handful of homeless people gathered to discuss plans to pressure Mayor Adrian Fenty for a meeting by visiting his office, or by marching to his home. They also mulled strategies to appeal to the City Council for emergency legislation to stop the closure of Franklin at least until April of next year.

"Do you want to have a sleep-in?" asked John McDermott, a homeless man and activist.

Fenty has said his plans to close the shelter at 13th and K streets NW fit into a larger long-term effort to replace such temporary emergency facilities with permanent housing for the chronically homeless.

But advocates for keeping the Franklin shelter open argue that the permanent housing units will not be in place soon enough, or in adequate numbers to shelter all the men who currently stay at Franklin.

"One thousand guys go through there in a month," said Luby.

And they predict that if the closure is part of a strategy to gentrify the neighborhood, the effort will ultimately backfire.

"If you close the shelter, the quote unquote eyesores that are inside the shelter are going to be outside on the street," predicted Sheptock, who lives in the shelter himself.

Fenty's office did not return requests from Street Sense for comment.

The slated closure of Franklin Shelter is

just the latest episode in a long-running drama that Snyder helped define 30 years ago, when he started his first shelter at Luther Place Memorial Church on Thomas Circle. It was in that period when, over three frigid D.C. winters, 26 homeless people died in the city – some virtually in the shadow of the White House. Snyder brought attention to the mounting toll of homelessness, building a movement around hunger strikes and street theater in the nation's capital.

As a result of one of Snyder's long fasts during the presidential campaign of 1984, the administration of President Ronald Reagan turned over an abandoned federal building to Snyder's group, the Community for Creative Non-Violence. The shelter, which once housed 1,350 and continues to shelter roughly 800, has been known as one of America's largest.

But efforts to move beyond emergency shelters to more comprehensive responses to homelessness continue.

At the curbside memorial on Thursday, those gathered sought to summon up Snyder's energy and imagination. His longtime colleague and companion, Carol Fen-

nelly, recalled the "laugh boxes" he passed around to disrupt a city meeting. Others remembered his love for civil disobedience and his phone calls with the invitation: "Would you like to get arrested?"

At the end of the small Thursday service, Snyder's friends sang "Happy Birthday." And Jack Rieffer, parish administrator at Luther Place, offered a benediction.

"Help up remember Mitch's example to find new ways to accomplish new things."

"If you close the shelter, the quote unquote eyesores that are inside the shelter are going to be outside on the street."

— Eric Sheptock, Franklin resident

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Bond Between Pets and Homeless Can Create Challenges

By Rebecca Ratner

When Brenda Lee-Wilson, a formerly homeless woman from Texas, came to the Washington, D.C., area in 2004, all she had was a few personal items and her Labrador mix, Rowdy.

She quickly realized that having a pet would prevent her from getting into most shelters and housing programs, but rather than leave her dog behind and try and find housing for herself, she chose to stay on the streets.

"The two things that people could never take away from me was my faith in God and my dog," she said recently.

She was given information by shelters about boarding her pet at a humane society or a dog shelter, but she refused to leave his side. Her dog was all she had to keep her grounded and feel loved when the rest of the world seemed to turn its back and walk away. Rowdy stayed with Wilson and helped keep her strong.

"That is why God spelled backwards is 'dog.' It's God's tangible form of love for us," she said.

Lee-Wilson is not alone in her struggle to find shelter with a pet. Nationwide, many homeless people opt to sleep on the streets rather than get rid of their pet. Genevieve Frederick, executive director and founder of Feeding Pets of the Homeless, a nonprofit organization that provides shelters and food banks with pet food for homeless pets, as well as grants for veterinarians who want to help such animals, notes that many homeless people develop strong ties with their pets.

"There is a bond between humans and animals," said Frederick. "It's amazing because



Brenda Lee-Wilson and her dog, Rowdy.

many of the animals don't have leashes and they just stay with the person because they have a sense of being needed."

Similarly, having an animal gives many homeless people a sense of being needed and wanted.

Frederick said it's not uncommon to see "an obese animal and a malnourished human because the person is going to give the animal whatever food they can scrounge up and not worry about themselves."

But the strong relationships between pets and their homeless owners poses challenges for shelters, many of which are unable to accommodate animals. The issue is further complicated by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, which makes it unlawful to discriminate against the disabled, including the mentally impaired. That has allowed some homeless people to obtain letters from doctors saying their animals provide emotional support, creating a situation where shelters are forced to take in animals.

Lee-Wilson was able to obtain such papers that allowed her to bring Rowdy into any shelter she chose, but she said she was sometimes

questioned by shelter workers, who noted that she was not blind or suffering from a mental disability.

While this loophole in the system may be good news for Lee-Wilson and for other homeless people with pets, shelters are struggling to maintain facilities that can accommodate pets. And some are beginning to question the validity of the emotional support claim. So-called "compassion animals" can create work for shelter staffers and put other residents at a disadvantage.

To cope with the problem, St. Stephen's Shelter in Minneapolis, Minn., considers homeless pet owners on a case-by-case basis. Allison Hoberg, a staffer at the shelter, said the facility started taking in dogs when one of their workers who was also a resident of the shelter had a dog that was sleeping outside in the brutal cold.

If a resident plans on being in the shelter for an extended period of time, Hoberg said the shelter can arrange for dog foster care. "I send out e-mails to all the people I know and oftentimes someone will feel bad about the situation of a homeless person and will want to help, so they will take in their dog for a while." They will also arrange for veterinary services for dogs if they are needed. The facility does not accept cats or other animals; Hoberg said cats pose separate challenges because they are less likely to remain near their owners and could accidentally be let out by

"The two things that people could never take away from me was my faith in God and my dog."

— Brenda Lee-Wilson

another resident.

In San Francisco, the Street Outreach Services has a branch dedicated to helping the pets of the homeless. Founded in 2001, the organization provides physical examinations, vaccinations, and acute medical care to homeless pets, as well as leashes, collars and pet food.

In Washington D.C., the Alliance for Stray Animals and People provides services for the financially struggling individuals who need help with animals, including contributing toward veterinary services, according to

its Web site.

Unfortunately, local shelters who allow pets are less common. Calls to 10 shelters in the Washington, D.C., area and Virginia revealed they do not allow animals of any kind to stay in the shelters with their owners, unless a homeless person has documentation that their animal is a "working animal" and they need it either for emotional support or because of a physical or mental disability.

Lee-Wilson was fortunate to have found a way to keep Rowdy by her side. However, many other homeless are still struggling to find a place to stay with their pets, an uphill battle that shows no signs of getting any easier.

Rebecca Ratner is a summer intern for the National Coalition for the Homeless.

Voters, from page 1

"I side with you on this" she told the audience. "We need to have Franklin open this winter."

Schwartz also expressed concern that the city was not providing adequate nonhousing services to the homeless, including more workforce development and addiction treatment programs.

In his remarks, Brown didn't directly address the proposed Franklin Shelter closing. Instead, he attacked the leadership record of the Fenty administration and the council. He also spoke about the importance of the city's providing more job skill training.

Noting that he is a third-generation D.C. resident, and that his father, former Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, had been a social worker before he became a "hot shot" political figure, Brown opened his comments with an observation about the lack of vocational schools in D.C. today compared to when he was growing up.

Brown stressed what he said he saw as the fruits of poor leadership in D.C. government. "We're at the top of the list [of U.S. cities] in all the bad stuff," he said.

He also chastised the D.C. Council for its alleged failure to provide effective oversight of the Fenty administration's policies and program directions.

"The current council is letting the mayor

do whatever he wants to do," Brown said. "There's no accountability."

Referring to the city's investment in the new baseball stadium and to the growth of condo development, Brown called for a different approach. "Folks have to stand up to the business community," he said.

In response to an audience member's question about how the city should deal with the issue of senior citizens with mental health issues, Brown replied that many seniors also had difficulties obtaining food stamps, covering increasing transportation costs, and paying higher property taxes while living on a fixed income. While indicating an appreciation for these problems, Brown presented no specific policy or program recommendations.

The FMC candidate forum is something that Howarth hopes to expand this year. He intends to invite Kwame Brown and Dee Hunter, two other candidates for "at large" council seats to address homeless voters, and, if possible, to include representatives of the Obama and McCain campaigns.

"Homeless folks should register and vote and be treated like any other voters," he said.

But the reason for FMC's candidate forum goes beyond empowerment through the ballot, Howarth added. "The deeper reason is that by marching and questioning the candidates, the men [at the FMC] are standing up for themselves," he said.

Plunge, from page 4

And Thomas was cautiously optimistic about the outcomes this visit would have for the city's homeless. "It was a little bit strange to be back [at the shelter] for a night," he reflected.

"It bothered me that a year and a half later, the same questions were going unanswered; I saw the same faces in the shelter." Thomas wants to see more councilmembers – and any public official – take this challenge.

In the end, however, it seemed the experience was valuable for all who were involved. The residents met an official who has been active in the city government for years and got a chance to voice their con-

cerns. Barry was able to hear from fellow D.C. residents who can't afford soaring prices for their own place, even with a full-time job. And shelter staff and homeless advocates were reminded first hand why they must continue to work tirelessly to prevent and end homelessness here in D.C. and across the country.

For more information about the Homeless Challenge Project, how you can get involved and for more on the nation's most pressing homeless issues, visit www.nationalhomeless.org or contact Jony Bell at jbelle@nationalhomeless.org or (202) 462-4822 x 230.

Jonathan "Jony" Bell is development associate for the National Coalition for the Homeless.

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IN OTHER NEWS

By Jon Pattee

Beijing's Homeless Lose Out to Olympic Games

As Beijing scrambles to present a clean and modern look to the media and tourists at the Olympic Games, homeless residents have been sent to relief centers on the outskirts of the city. According to an Aug. 5 Wall Street Journal article by Sky Canaves, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers may already have been sent packing ahead of the Olympics. Protests are rare and quelled swiftly. China stands out for how it "forcibly displaces people on such a scale," Nicholas Bequelin, China research director for the New York activist group Human Rights Watch, told the paper.

Report: NYC Mayor's Challenge to Homelessness Stalled

New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's initiative to end homelessness is far from a success, according to an Aug. 7 New York Times article by Fernanda Santos. The effort, begun in 2004, surprised many with the ambitious goals of slashing the number of homeless people by two-thirds in five years by building more homes, channeling more money into prevention, and trying to ensure that shelters would be used only by the truly needy. But according to the city's Independent Budget Office, almost as many families were living in city shelters in March — about 8,500 — as when the mayor unveiled his proposal, though investment in prevention services had increased by at least 20%.

Soaring Numbers of Homeless Women in UK

The number of homeless women in the United Kingdom has risen by nearly 80% in five years, according to "Women and Homelessness," a report released by the Conservative Party on Aug. 3. Tens of thousands of single women and children are being forced to live in hostels, sleep outdoors or rely on friends and family as waiting lists for low-income housing get longer, said an account by Nina Lakhani and Jane Merrick in *The Independent*. The majority of adults in the UK's temporary housing are single mothers. The government has pledged to halve the number of people in temporary housing by 2010.

Weak Economy Swells Ranks of Salt Lake City's Homeless

According to advocates for the homeless in Salt Lake City, the struggling U.S. economy is leading to homeless shelters bursting at the seams with families and women either evicted from their homes or fleeing domestic violence. An Aug. 11

Associated Press report noted that the Davis County shelter for battered and homeless women was hard-pressed to find space for everyone who needed it. Salt Lake City's Road Home shelter, meanwhile, is putting an average of 15 families on extra cots in the board room and hallways each night, and has more than 70 families on its waiting list.

Sacramento Reports Fewer Chronically Homeless

California's city of Sacramento claims that local and national efforts to find shelter for people who are homeless for extended periods are working. An Aug. 11 report by Ed Fletcher in the *Sacramento Bee* cites city officials as reporting that from January 2007 to January 2008, the number of chronically homeless was down 5%, even as the total number of homeless within Sacramento County increased. The article attributed the reductions to a federal push to move resources from temporary shelters to supporting long-term housing efforts aimed at keeping the chronically homeless off the streets.

New Threats Haunt Homeless Asylum-Seekers in S. Africa

Refugees from violence against foreigners are now facing trouble in South Africa for breaking the law by camping next to a highway. The African Diaspora Forum (ADF) compiled a list of the names of 466 asylum seekers, of whom 278 said they now wanted to return to their country of origin. South Africa has been wracked in recent months by riots targeting foreigners over competition for resources. According to a July 28 article in *The Star* by Kanina Foss, the ADF is suggesting that the foreigners be temporarily accommodated at a nearby nongovernmental organization. But they are still waiting for the go-ahead from the government.

Needs of Homeless Vets Increase in Phoenix

The need for help for homeless veterans is rising in Phoenix, according to an Aug. 9 article by Connie Cone Sexton in *The Arizona Republic*. The Phoenix Veterans Affairs office helped 1,269 homeless vets in fiscal year 2007, reported Sexton, compared with the national site average of 514. Some 154,000 homeless vets live in the United States. Of those, about 2,700 are in the Phoenix Valley, said Steve Cohen, a coordinator for the homeless for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Each year, Phoenix's Project CHALLENGE (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) conducts a survey regarding unmet needs of homeless veterans. The 2007 survey highlighted the need for dental care.

While more than 2 million Americans go homeless, our government has spent over \$500 billion fighting a war in Iraq.

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STREET NEWS SERVICE

Derailer: A Two-Wheeled Revolution for the Denver Community

By Morning Glory Farr

Homelessness. Poverty. Environmental destruction. Sexual discrimination. Sweatshop labor. Gender bias. In the world of social activism, there are many causes. And for each of these causes, there are nonprofits formed to deal specifically with the issues related to their chosen injustice. But in a back-alley warehouse in the Santa Fe district of Denver, one nonprofit is managing to address all of these issues, with one simple solution: bikes.

The Derailer Bike Collective, started in 2001, did not set out to be a cure-all nonprofit. It began as a simple idea in a few students' minds: Get bikes to people who need them, and once they have them, teach them how to fix them so they can keep using them.

"We started opening shop, mostly because of the demand in the neighborhood," said Mac Liman, who has volunteered with the Derailer for several years. "We had some resources and then people had these needs, so we got to create it as a response to what people were actually wanting."

Three days a week, the Derailer opens its shop and helps low-income, homeless and marginalized community members build a bike or repair existing bikes for free.

As a testament to its much-needed services, the Derailer Bike Collective has an average of 60 visitors per day during its shop hours. The Derailer does no formal outreach, with almost all of its visitors having heard about the program through a relative, a neighbor or a friend.

It is this sense of community, along with the "Be the change you want to see in the world" Gandhi-style attitude embodied by the Derailer founders and volunteers who have built the idea of a simple bike shop into a visionary nonprofit. As one bike after another was built, the Derailer simultaneously built its own nonprofit frame of empowerment, acceptance and sustainability.

"Bikes are an amazing context for all these things to happen, because people need transportation, people need a way to get around from one place to another," said Sarah Graves, a volunteer bike mechanic at the Derailer. "If you don't have a lot of money, you don't have a lot of great options, and there are a lot of people in the city who don't have a lot of money."

It's Thursday afternoon, Build-a-Bike day at the Derailer Bike Collective. John Alexander is busy putting the last touches on his newest used bicycle. Alexander came to Denver more than seven years ago, homeless, with



The Derailer bike shop in Denver is open three days a week to help homeless and low-income community members build a bike or repair existing bikes for free.

"Bikes are an amazing context for all of these things to happen, because people need a way to get around from one place to another. If you don't have a lot of money, you don't have a lot of great options, and there are a lot of people in the city who don't have a lot of money."

— Sarah Graves,
volunteer bike mechanic

limited resources. After finding out about the Derailer Bike Collective from his brother, he has been visiting its shop ever since.

"I have been here probably 50 times, to do repairs and little stuff," said Alexander. "I've had four bikes since I lived here – my last one got stolen, so now, I got this one."

Alexander was able to acquire several of his bikes by building them, with the help of a Derailer volunteer bike mechanic. It typically takes about two days to build a bike, and once it's done, bike owners can return to the shop for repairs, replacement parts or simply for camaraderie.

In the homeless community, bikes are ideal for many reasons. They provide transportation to get to services, like food lines, overnight shelters and medical clinics, which are often spread out across miles. They cost nothing to operate. They provide the owner with a sense of freedom and agency that is often missing in people who have to rely so heavily on others for assistance. Alexander is readily embracing that sense of freedom.

"I'm planning on biking out to California, to the beach," said Alexander. "It will be a lot of pedaling, but I have my bike, so I got what I need."

But the benefits of bikes are not reserved solely for the homeless and low-income community. The Derailer also encourages girls and women to take part in building and repairing bikes. Founded by women, the Derailer Bike Collective has always promoted a shop environment that is tolerant, respectful and welcoming to everyone, regardless of race, gender, class, sexuality or age. In addition to its Build-A-Bike and Open Shop hours, the Derailer offers a S.P.I.N. workshop on Tuesday afternoons. S.P.I.N. stands for Super Power Inclusion Night, and is open to women and gender-variant participants.

"This is a really great context for accessing education and for people to get to use tools. That is a rare thing in a lot of people's lives, especially girls and women," said Graves. "I think that is really empowering – somebody can go through this process of learning about something, make it work, and then they have this bicycle that is now their free form of transportation, and it can take them anywhere."

Other elements of the Derailer, including environmental awareness, consumer consciousness and long-term sustainability, naturally presented themselves in the form of bikes. Soon after opening the shop, the Derailer volunteers quickly realized that bikes were everywhere in the city. Well, pieces of bikes: in alleyways, in trash heaps, rusting in backyards across the city.

The shop receives all of its bikes and parts from donations, largely from individuals, but also from commercial bike shops in the area.

This, along with the fact that all of its mechanics are strictly volunteer, keeps the Derailer's operating budget extremely low and, thus, financially viable.

The Derailer does receive some financial contributions as well, largely on an individual-donor basis.

But being economically feasible is only half of the equation of sustainability. The other important element is the people who use the shop's services. It is their contributions and involvement that will help the Derailer continue to develop and be a lasting part of the community.

"Our aim, ideally, is that people who are using the space are running the space," said Graves.

"We want it to be a community-based shop, that people feel ownership over it, and feel empowered to use it as they need to use it."

Reprinted from Denver Voice © Street News Service: www.street-papers.org

Street Sense Writers' Group

Every Wednesday 2:30 p.m.

Everyone is welcome. Snacks will be provided.
Contact editor@streetsense.org for information.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What's the world coming to
Other than plagued jalapenos
And AIDS-laced tomatoes?

An African American running a 100-yard dash
For president while the great Tim Russert takes up residence in
Journalism heaven (Go Buffalo Bills!)

Meet the pressure in the dissed-trick as gun laws pull out beach
Chairs, picnic blankets to relax, catch suntans

Can one man really rescue the United States when many teens' reality of
Dr. King's dream is simply living Lohan and/or contaminating the heights
Of hip-hop culture with the vigor of Lil Wayne?

The N word remains a spin word
That gas prices slash the cost of living is so unrighteous, so unforgiving
The economy receives another autopsy, yet the cause of death
Is inconclusive

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Picture Paris Hilton and P. Diddy tying the knot, or Flavor Flav
And Britney Spears jumping the broom

In the meantime, 48 of Michael Vicks' monsters find loving
Homes, Hannity and Colmes travel to Israel with Mahmoud
Ahmandinejad in tow

Raul Castro and Angelina Jolie share a banana split at Camp David
Watching an Afro'ed Michelle Obama on the defense with Wolf Blitzer,
CNN's Late Edition

Back in the dissed-trick the infamous mayor of Southeast, The Great Marion Barry,
hints at 100 yard dashing for Adrian Fenty's
Pimp seat

It gets greater later as Republicrats and Demopublicans sling mud and
Throw bricks to arrive early at the Green after party hosted by none other
Than Ralph Nader himself

Formaldehyde-soaked FEMA trailers used as check points on Trinidad?
Baghdad in Brentwood? What's good in your neighborhood?

He who speaks is like silver, but she who listens is like gold
Get your FOOD FOR THOUGHT at Street Sense.

— Bro. Dewayne Harrison
brotherdewayne1@aol.com



The Homeless Traveler

From city to city I roam with no real place to call home. My family is all gone. Walking the highways and sleeping in the streets. Maybe I could stop at this service station for a drink. A lady is standing there dressed all in pink. I pass her to get a drink. I wonder what she thinks. Because my clothes are all dirty and my feet stink. She glance at me but didn't stare as she walk away with her head in the air.

I'm the Homeless Traveler. I didn't care.

I'm hungry now, walking a little ways down the street. I see Kentucky Fried Chicken, all you can eat. I decide I'll walk in and see what I can eat.

I took a seat, cross my hands, started to pat my feet thinking to myself, "Mash potato and gravy chicken, man that would be sweet." Some customers gave me some cold and dirty looks and mean stares. I gave all of them a homeless stare back saying, "I'm the Homeless Traveler. I don't care."

I looked to my right and left. What do I see – a waitress staring at me. Her eyes were saying, "Hu hu, I see you. I'll let you take it but you better not come back."

So I got up on my feet and headed straight to the table with the meat and out the door and on to the street, looking for a place to rest and eat my meat.

You may ask why I live this way, homeless everyday. You may see me in your hometown or on your streets, want to stop and take a peek. Look and stare, just remember I'm the Homeless Traveler. I don't care.

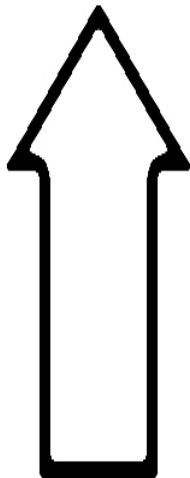
— By Ivory Wilson

It Do What It Does

It do what it does.
 This is about love,
 A big love story,
 It'll end how it's s'pose to,
 Everything's together,
 I pray it don't fall apart,
 I got a good thing going,
 I love the man I live with,
 It's a baby babe world,
 This ain't a man's world,
 It's unconventional,
 Baby Alice in control,
 Because baby is the queen,
 Baby's got to keep this together,
 In order for everything to work,
 My man loves me,
 Takes care of me,
 Helps me with everything,
 And been keeping me clean,
 It is when he's not around,
 Is when I'm vulnerable,
 And scared of the world,
 Baby goes with people,
 Hates herself for what she does,
 Because he's too good to me,
 I belong with him,
 I'm his property,
 If I'm anyone's property,
 I am the property of God,
 God's baby's boss,
 Spread peace and love,
 Pray things are good,
 Praying for life.

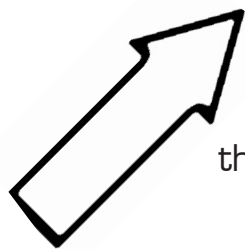
— Baby Alice

As Street Sense moves up its circulation and its vendors move up and off the street, we ask you to join us and help move on up the prices of auction items at...

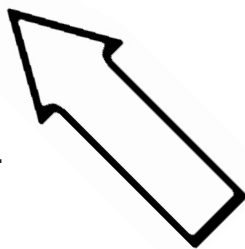


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MOVIE IN REVIEW By Maurice King

"Mamma Mia"



musical performances are concerned, for the most part, the cast as a whole performs well. However, it must be remembered that certain cast members, such as Pierce Brosnan, were chosen mostly for their appeal to women, not for their singing voices.

The story is set on a fictitious island named Kalokairi in Greece dedicated to the goddess Aphrodite. Donna (Meryl Streep), a hotel owner on the island, is the mother to Sophie (Amanda Seyfried), who is about to get married to Sky (Dominic Cooper). Sophie hopes to be given away at the wedding by her father. The only problem is her mother apparently lived a rather wild life as a youth and is not really sure who Sophie's father is. Unbeknownst to Donna, Sophie finds her mother's diary and reads references to three different men (Pierce Brosnan, Colin Firth, Stellan Skarsgard). Donna had been intimate with each of these men around the time Sophie was conceived. Sophie, therefore, contacts all three to come to her wedding, never dreaming all three of them would show up. Of course, these three men arrive knowing nothing of one another's existence or, for that matter, of any daughter's existence. All they knew was their time with Donna, who is less than delighted to see them turn up on her island on the eve of her daughter's wedding.

On July 18, "Mamma Mia!" had its debut to enormous box office success. "Mamma Mia!" had the largest weekend opening of any musical in United States history and is the sixth highest grossing musical film in U.S. history. It was also number one in Greek and United Kingdom box offices.

For those of you who have not yet seen "Mamma Mia," it is a fun film and should be viewed as such. Musical movies are not meant to be cinéma vérité, and anyone expecting such is indulging in wishful thinking to the extreme. The film is set in Greece, where it was filmed, with some extremely impressive scenery and cinematography that would serve as an excellent travel promotion for the Greek tourist industry. The film is filled with very impressive choreography and dancing. Of course, one would expect that from a Broadway play transformed into a movie.

The score highlights the music of ABBA. Though ABBA fans are certain to love the movie, even non-fans have reported they found the film very enjoyable. As far as the

When Donna was younger, she had supported herself as the lead singer in a group, Donna and the Dynamos. Her friends from the group, Rosie (Julie Walters) and Tanya (Christine Baranski), also show up for the wedding. They provide Donna with moral support during her time of need, and over the course of the film, the three perform a number of songs together.

Interestingly, original ABBA members Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus were involved in the making of the film and make cameo appearances in the film.

During the final credits, the members of the cast appear in the glittery clothing ABBA made trendy during its reign.

And so ends a film that is geared toward enjoyment, and that delivers.

MY TURN AT THE TABLE By August Mallory

Legal Seafood

It is a warm and sunny afternoon in downtown D.C. and Street Sense trio August Mallory, Lee Davis and Rita Brunson head for the Legal Sea Foods restaurant in Chinatown. We were killing two birds with one stone. Lee was celebrating his last day as a Street Sense volunteer before heading off to school to study photography, and we were seeking to do a restaurant review.

As we enter, we are warmly greeted by the host and our server takes our order. Our food is served promptly.

Quite impressive, if I do say so myself.

Well, Lee ordered the fish and chips, which he heartily devoured, and I ordered the crispy Montauk calamari dish, which consisted of French fries, fried squid, and nice warm biscuits with butter. I also ordered an appetizer, which included shrimp and an assortment of

other items.

I looked around the restaurant, and the atmosphere was absolutely superb – a very comfortable down home feeling. The meal was nice, and the employees were nice. I have visited many restaurants across the U.S., and I have to honestly say that Legal Sea Foods has to be one of the finer restaurants in America. The menu had a very nice variety of things.

Rita said the portions could have been larger. As for me, I still have a hankering for some shark. I didn't see this on their menu, but I am sure one of their other restaurants offers it.

I would highly recommend Legal Sea Foods for any seafood lover. And if you are looking for a place to meet for lunch meetings or an evening out with friends or the family, Legal Sea Foods is the place to be.

