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SHELTERS OF HOPE

*article by Lucinda E. Sinclair
photography by
Robin Anderson and Kim Thomas*

"The Waldorf it ain't, but it's better than staying in a car," says Rick, a tenant of Star Gables Motel, which has operated as a shelter for the homeless for about two years.

"I was living and working on this farm when I got fired," he says. "Last Sunday, I was told I could take my time moving out. Then, they told me Wednesday I had to go. They came up and cut the water and lights off." Rick, his wife and son are at Star Gables until Rick finds a new job. His wife works and they have saved some money, but it is not enough to live on.

Star Gables and Mercy House are the two main facilities in Harrisonburg designed to help people like Rick who find themselves temporarily homeless and in need of support. While both shelters are

**We've lived in a car
for a year and a half, a tent,
and sometimes a pull trailer
with our three children.**

new to the area, they operate quite differently.

From Route 11 North, the Star Gables 16-unit motel resembles a line of quaint blue cottages connected by arching carports that hide their 40 years. But up close, the poverty is apparent. The doors are boarded up, and the windows are covered in sheets of thick plastic for insulation. Abandoned appliances, TVs, washers and even a kitchen sink are placed neatly outside doors waiting to be repaired and used. Inside, the rooms are dingy and dark. The showers do not have curtains, and mildew spots their floors.

Owner Norman Carr has made a "handshake deal" with manager Dick Randel that allows him to operate the motel for a tentative 10-year period. Carr says Randel can keep any profit he makes after paying the utilities and mortgage.

Randel, a large, red-bearded man, remembers, "I came here a little over two years ago in complete poverty." He owned a home-improvement business in Nebraska that went bankrupt in 1984. "I lost everything," he says. "We've lived in a car for a year and a half, a tent, and sometimes a pull trailer with our three children."

Randel uses his experience to relate to and assist others who come to the motel. "You've got to give people hope," he says. Randel and his wife, Laurie, know this hope takes form by providing all-around support such as food, clothing and jobs for the homeless.

But Laurie, a tall, blond woman, says, "It has to come together all at once or it doesn't work." Randel illustrates this with one of his own experiences. While working to put a roof on a house, "I put a spike through my foot. I had no money to go to the hospital or to get medicine. The foot festered within three days." Randel had to stop work on the roof and lost the job.

Although Star Gables is run much like a motel, tenants pay only if they can afford it. Randel says, "The place should pay for itself if I have 11 people

paying their rent [of \$80 to \$97] each week."

Mercy House is a more formal and structured operation than Star Gables. Affluent Harrisonburg citizens, concerned with the area's homeless families, held public meetings to try to open a shelter to house them temporarily. Mercy House was born.

The non-profit organization owns two buildings in Harrisonburg that can house up to nine families. These apartment buildings, located on High Street, are large, solid brick buildings, grandiose compared to the dainty, old-fashioned cottages of Star Gables.

No discarded items lay around outside. The rooms are small, but each has its own shower, closet and tiny kitchen. Inside the apartments, the short green carpet appears to have been vacuumed recently and the bed carefully made that morning. The conspicuously absent personal items and furnishings are the tell tale signs that these are temporary living arrangements.

Most of Mercy House's current residents are working mothers with children. Helen, a tall, black woman with a husky laugh, recently moved here with her 8-year-old daughter after an accident forced her to seek help. "In the house where we were staying, the old-fashioned heater blew up, so all our clothes and stuff got burned up.

"I like it here," she says. "The best part about it is my daughter didn't have to change schools." But Helen was not always so positive about shelters. "I was kind of worried. I'm from [Washington,] D.C., and I'd never been in a shelter, but I heard they were pretty bad. I was surprised. This is great!"

According to Rockingham District Judge John Paul, one of the founders of Mercy House, the shelter is designed to provide more than just physical necessities. He says the shelter's goal is to supply guidance and financial counseling.

Clay Clark, acting director of Mercy House, says the shelter's first priority is to establish a housing and employment resource run by its volunteers



Children living in the shelters may have to face difficulties such as changes in schools and friends.

that would list current opportunities for clients.

But these services do not replace much-needed motivation. Sabrina, an ex-truck driver who lives with her 2-year-old daughter at Mercy House, says, "They need to give a little more encouragement rather than slapping your hands."

Unlike Star Gables, where residents are not allowed to stay if they receive welfare, Mercy House encourages families to apply for financial assistance. "We guide them to services we think they're entitled to," Paul says. "This may include legal aid. Many of our clients are entitled to Medicare, food stamps and Aid to Families with Dependent Children."

Mercy House cannot help the homeless with all their problems. Sabrina describes people's discouraging attitudes: "When you put in an application somewhere with this as your address, they look at you like they think

this is an institution, a place for drug addicts and alcoholics." She continues, emphasizing, "We're just people in bad situations who need homes and jobs."

Mercy House is more stringent than Star Gables. Mercy House gives preference to families with children over single adults, and most clients are referred there by agencies or churches. The screening procedure at Mercy House requires clients to open a savings account and have a job. Because of the \$100,000 state grant Mercy House has received, the shelter must fill out forms on all families accepted. Paul says, "We try not to keep anyone around for more than six weeks. One month is the goal."

Randel says to stay at Star Gables, "You can't come in with money in your pocket. You have to have a need to be here. The only time we can do any good is if someone needs us." Single adults and families are welcome

to stay as long as they like at Star Gables. Most people hear about the shelter by word of mouth instead of through churches or agencies. Jim, a single man staying at Star Gables, said, "Me and my family were in Waynesboro when another family said they stayed here." Randel has no forms to fill out for the state, but he has the problem of meeting the monthly bills.

Courage to keep going can be hard to maintain, but somehow the homeless do so. Sabrina says, "You can never give up hope, 'cause if you do, you might as well throw in the towel."

Randel looks for progress in all his tenants. "If you do just one thing more than you did the day before you pulled up in my driveway, we've succeeded."

Lucinda Sinclair is a communication major who will graduate in May. She hopes to write for an environmental magazine in the West.

FOCUS

Star Gables

Motel reaches out to support the needy

By Jennifer Kornegay
Staff writer

Bill and Mary Jones hadn't had a permanent place to live in seven years.

Their children didn't go to school regularly because the family was moving around so much. They didn't have enough money to pay the bills, and their electricity was about to be cut off. Bill had cataracts and was legally blind, and every time he got a job, the employer soon would find out and let him go.

"The longest job I had in seven years was for five months," Bill says, smiling shyly, "and that was because I stayed away from the bossman."

A year ago, however, things got better for the Joneses. The people at the Star Gables motel got in touch with Bill and said they wanted to help him and his family.

The Star Gables manager had heard about Bill from a relative who was at the motel. Five days later, after working through a network of churches and police stations from Texas to Virginia, Bill, his wife, her mother and their two daughters arrived at the Star Gables.

Bill soon got an eye operation funded by Vision Handicap of Virginia, and today he sees clearly again and has a full-time job. His family has its own trailer and finally is back on its feet.

In his quiet Texan accent, Bill says, "things are 100 percent better."

The Joneses are just one family who have gone through Star Gables motel in the last 1 1/2 years. The residents go there from places like Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia and Texas, often with no gas in their cars and no money in their pockets.

The people who find their way to Rt. 11, north of Harrisonburg, where Star Gables is located, are just trying to "make it." They pay rent weekly until they find another place or move on.

From the road, Star Gables is a story-book village of small blue cottages with a large, grassy front yard.

Behind this first roadside view, however, the scene isn't so pleasant. Things are a bit more cluttered, and repairs obviously need to be made.

The paint is chipped and faded on many of the units, 16 of which are now in working order — and occupied — and trash lies scattered around the yard.

Nobody seems to know quite how people find their way to Star Gables,

but the fact that matters is that they do.

About 1 1/2 years ago, Dick Randall and his family arrived at Star Gables motel with \$82. They had been traveling around the country for three years visiting churches and working with the Salvation Army.

The original manager of Star Gables moved out suddenly and through what Dick calls "the grace of God," he was able to get a job operating the place.

When he took over the motel, people weren't paying the weekly rent, the business was losing money and it owed thousands of dollars to the electric company.

Dick then started paying the bills and

trying to get the motel back in business again. A few months later, the owner of Star Gables told him the bank was going to foreclose on the place because of so many outstanding bills. He told Dick that if he could save the motel, he would give it to him — no questions asked — for 10 years.

Now, more than a year later, Dick owns the Star Gables motel.

A heavyset man with a thick beard and hair, Dick is almost a forbidding character. Leaning across the kitchen table, he draws listeners into conversation with his strong Nebraskan accent and his adamant views on poverty in the United States and the

condition of the working poor.

He believes that in the last 20 years, something has been lost — people just don't seem to care about the poor and the homeless anymore. The poverty situation won't change "unless society is willing to change its thinking toward the poor," Dick says.

Most of residents of Star Gables represent what Dick calls the working poor. He defines the term as those who work, but have nothing left over.

These people never are able to get ahead or save money because they only have the bare minimum of what it takes to survive. Dick estimates that about 20 percent of the people who arrive at the motel have nothing when they get there.

"Those who can pay, pay, those who can't, don't," Dick says, "and God Bless it, I can find a way to take care of it."

Often, Dick ends up housing a number of people under his own roof. At one time, he had as many as 10 people living in his house, which is located right next to the motel.

Lee is one of the two people staying in the Randall house now. A pretty girl in her early 20s, Lee has lived most of her life in foster homes and is on her own now. She's been at Star Gables for more than a month now, works full-time at a nearby business and is happy with her more stable life.

"It's comfortable... they don't give me a hard time," Lee says.

Richard, his wife Linda and their daughter Ashley live in another unit at Star Gables, a tiny efficiency crowded by a large bed. There's about four feet of walking space and a small bathroom.

Originally from Texas, they've been in the area several weeks and Richard got a job at Coors. They were living near his workplace until they moved to Star Gables "because it was cheaper than where they were."

They've been at the motel for a few weeks, and they hope to move to their own place as soon as they can afford it and send for the rest of their children who are still in Texas.

Members of the JMU Baptist Students Union visit Star Gables on Fridays. The students spend time talking to the people and doing activities with the children like taking them to movies and McDonald's, and playing games with them in the yard.

"The people [there] are all the same: they need a chance to get on their



Dick Russell sits on the steps of Star Gables with his children and with some children staying at the motel.

(Continued from page 15)

foot again — they just had a few bad knocks," says Angie Jones, a BSU member who regularly visits the motel.

Jay Searcy, another student, says, "I'm glad it's here. Otherwise, there'd be a lot of people with no place to stay."

Dick says, "it's wonderful that the kids from JMU come out to Star Gables — the students can't get from books what's out here."

Dick reaches out to people and helps them get their lives together. He helps them find jobs, housing, and in some cases, counseling they might need.

In a world of neglect and non-caring, "it's an oasis," he says. "Here they get help."

Dick and his own family are like many of the people at Star Gables — they have just enough money to make it.

"I don't know how sometimes," he says, "but we do."

See MOTEL page 16 >

Randall Challenges Church To Care



Dick Randall, the owner of Star Gables Motel on Rt. 11, is getting the place ready for winter by adding insulation. (photo by Mark Bergman)

by Dorcas Zook

A lot is said about "community" at EMC. The EMC community, the world community, and, most importantly, the church community. But there is someone in Harrisonburg who wants to challenge the Christian community to practice what it preaches.

His name is Dick Randall. Randall is the new owner of the Star Gables Motel, just north of Harrisonburg on U.S. Rt. 11. What was once a run down lodging for tourists has become a haven for many people who,

without the help of Randall, might be on the streets, in jail, or even dead.

Randall was once homeless himself. But through the grace of God, as he would tell you, he now has a home, a job, a future, and has helped many persons just like himself to find a secure position in life.

The story of how he came to own Star Gables is nothing short of a modern-day miracle, too long to print in so short a space. But in less than one year, ownership has been turned over to a man who came to the motel, where he now lives, with only \$82, a wife and children, and no

job. In short, the motel was given to him, on the condition that he take over all outstanding debts, which came to approximately \$40,000.

He started out charging \$87-96 per week. But soon, people started to come to him in search of help. They were unemployed, abandoned, evicted, pregnant and homeless. And Randall, who tries to live by the principles of Matthew 25, could not turn them away. Now, if someone needs a place to stay, and does not have the money, Randall will put them up at Star Gables until the problem is over, even if he has to lose money to do it.

And lose money he has. The back-payments alone come to \$1044 a week. If his tenants can not come up with their rent, he pays the difference out of his pocket.

Star Gables can do this with the help of individuals. Individuals for which Randall is grateful. But he is not grateful to the

"Most people who call themselves Christians wouldn't even set foot in this place..." said Randall

church. Why? Because the church has done nothing to help him.

"God has led me to a place that is spiritually dead. A place with lots of churches, but not love," said Randall. Harsh words. But all too unfortunately, they are true. Randall's challenge to Christians is simple. "Don't say it, DO IT! Don't tell me you love these people, tell THEM!"

Randall says the answer to homelessness is not a political answer, but a spiritual one. The Bible says to take care of the poor. "If there weren't any poor people, you couldn't practice Christianity," he explained.

At Star Gables, myths and stereotypes are shattered. The

poor have names and faces. They want to work. They are not hopeless cases; most only stay at Star Gables a few months before they find work and affordable housing. Most of the people who came to Randall are now successfully out on their own. None of them are poor because they want, or deserve, to be.

Perhaps the biggest stereotype that is shattered is that Christians always care. "If we care," asked Randall, "why do we turn our back on the poor, who are, like us, God's children?"

Randall does not just want financial support, but spiritual support as well. He wants Christians to do more than just pray, but to put their faith into action—by loving the poor, by giving money and time.

"Most of the people who call themselves Christians wouldn't even set foot in this place; they're afraid of us," said Randall.

Randall challenges Christians to love the poor as Christ would if he were here today. If anyone would like to help the Star Gables Motel, and the plight of the homeless, call Randall at 433-0623. Or, even better, come to Star Gables and visit the people there. Randall wants to see people love the poor directly, at their level, not from far away.

As said before, the Star Gables Motel is a modern-day miracle. Best of all, it is a miracle in which everyone can take part.

Mercy House To Offer Shelter In City By Winter

by Sheila Myers

Its motto is "Fostering independence based on the golden

rule. There is a good possibility of a particular house in Harrisonburg becoming Mercy House, but things have not been finalized yet. It could be worked out

place, and it will also need donations to stay open. The Virginia Housing Authority has already promised a \$100,000 matching grant. For every dollar donated

will not be separated. Also, along with housing and feeding families, there will be a program to help people find jobs and permanent housing. Mercy House is

ally. Houses might be set up in several different parts of the city.

For the success of this project, there will have to be community

Local haven for homeless proposed

Harrisonburg needy could be rehabilitated by 'farm' project

by Brian Tetro
staff writer

The farmlands of Rockingham County may soon serve as a backdrop for more than just animals and vegetables.

Proposals for a farm project that rehabilitates homeless people were laid out by a panel of city officials at the Shenandoah Presbytery last month.

The Rockingham Farm Community will be an all-inclusive, self-help project designed by Dick Randel, a Harrisonburg homeless advocate, to help those in need.

"The overall picture of the farm is to help people beat down from society by offering a place free of pressures and strings of the outside world," Randel said.

The farm will focus primarily on alcoholics, drug-abusers and mentally troubled people in Harrisonburg and is anticipated to begin operating in early September 1994.

Randel described his concept of the farm as one that would not warehouse people but rather help them to get back on their feet.

He said the farm should be operated mainly by the residents in order for them to take on responsibility and further

develop their decision-making skills.

"I want to help people gain a sense of giving rather than receiving," Randel said.

Although a specific site hasn't been determined, the farm is planned to be between 180 and 200 acres and offer its residents a "therapeutic outlook."

"Ideally, the farm should be located near a river and provide enough outhouses to make the project worthwhile," Randel said. The outhouses would be small homes for the residents of the farm.

"It should be a place where people feel far-removed from society rather than right near the local liquor store," he said.

The farm will run programs that focus on substance abuse, finance planning and job preparation. A board comprised of community members in Rockingham County will oversee the operation of the farm.

"I would like to give these people attributes that allow them to work within society rather than fight against it," Randel said. "I want to immediately house these people, give them rest and meals, and then ask them what they need. I believe that is the starting point of rehabilitation."

Titus Bender, a professor of social work at Eastern Mennonite College, said the farm's success would be tied to a slow and steady growth.

"Because he can apply a peer approach to the problem, I believe that Dick should be empowered by the community to operate this farm project,"

Bender said. "However, I think that it must be limited in both size and structure for it to be successful."

He stressed the relationship between Randel and the community board overseeing the project as one of the most important factors in the farm's success.

"It is important that there be mutual trust between the board and Randel," Bender said. "From the board's perspective, they want to see that their money is wisely invested and that Randel is not enabling the needy to stay in their present condition."

"On the other hand, the board should allow Randel to operate the farm in a way that does not hinder his peer approach."

Judge John Paul of the Harrisonburg City Court said that there should be a limit to the number of residents at any one time.

"If you have 100 people housed at the farm at one time, the project is no longer therapeutic," Paul said. "However, if you take five alcoholics at a time, then you can better concentrate on each individual's needs."

Randel said, "Although the farm may be small in its early stages, it will add more people as it grows."

Kay Goodman, associate executive at the Presbytery, said Randel's farm project offers an alternative solution to homelessness.

"This program will help both to relieve and prevent homelessness," she said. "While



CRAIG NEWMAN/THE BREEZE

Six of the eight Dimick children perch on the converted school bus that now serves as their home.

Homeless family of 10 working to overcome economic hardship

by Sara Hammel
staff writer

A big blue bus sits on a front lawn with simple curtains adorning several of the small windows. A group of children run out, clad only in thin t-shirts and pants, playing in the 40-degree weather.

A family of 10 lives in this bus. They've lived there for two months because they have no home.

The Dimicks are the faces of poverty in rural America. They came to Harrisonburg to find work, but in today's economy, the \$4.50 per hour Leroy Dimick makes farming just isn't enough to keep their heads above water.

Dick Randel, a local advocate for the homeless, has helped the Dimicks by allowing them to park their bus on his lawn. He's also worked to get them a piece of land and a mobile home to put on it.

But Randel said that solving the Dimicks' problems is only the beginning. Homelessness in rural areas like Rockingham County is growing, he said, and the government and local citizens aren't

ready to handle it.

"They have eight children — how in the name of God are they ever going to get the things they need?" he said. Randel, who managed a homeless shelter near Harrisonburg from 1987-89, has been helping the Dimicks since Leroy lost his farm job after a hernia operation last spring.

But Randel said that because Leroy Dimick still chooses to work, the family isn't eligible for Aid to Dependent Children, a form of welfare. Other resources, like the Harrisonburg Redevelopment Housing Authority, are also unable to help the Dimicks because so many people are already on a waiting list to get low-income housing.

The Dimicks have had trouble finding a home for several years, although Dimick has been consistently employed. Both Leroy Dimick and Randel said that the size of the family is an obstacle to getting affordable housing.

"A few years ago I was up in Waynesboro, and we checked in on the housing," Dimick said. "We had

\$2.3 million.

"It's more realistic to ask for increases in small increments," he said. "Sure, 15 and 17 percent increases are warranted, but it has to be made up gradually. After no salary increases in the last two years it will be well needed and deserved."

The committee also agreed to ask the board to increase student financial aid. If the board approves the recommendation and Virginia's General

Homeless

CONTINUED from page 1

one too many kids — they wouldn't take us. So we stayed in our van," he said.

The Dimicks — Leroy, his wife June and their eight children — now live in close, cold quarters. An extension cord from Randel's house powers their electric heater, and they use the facilities in the house to cook and wash clothes.

Through the help of various local donations, the Dimicks have gotten a piece of land and a trailer to live in. But until they get \$9,000 to put in a well, a septic system and a road, they'll have to stay in the bus.

The weather is getting colder, June Dimick admitted. But she doesn't complain.

"The heater keeps it [the bus] pretty warm, and we've got blankets," she said.

The Dimicks' problems are typical of many families, Randel said. And Anissa Lear, occupancy specialist for the Harrisonburg Redevelopment Housing Authority, said that although their top priority is to provide low-income housing for the homeless, they haven't been accepting applications since June.

"The waiting list had over 500 people on it," Lear said. "People were waiting over a year to be called for housing."

She said the Housing Authority won't be accepting applications again until December, and even then people will have to wait for housing.

But Randel said there shouldn't be a need for anyone to wait, because the resources are there but "aren't being utilized."

"Just in this area here, there's at least 100 acres of land I could go out and purchase tomorrow," Randel said.

"We can find more excuses to keep people out of housing than we can to put them in."

securities. Currently, JMU provides eligible students only 35 percent. To raise that level and provide more aid to more students, it would cost the university about \$1.2 million.

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Local homeless need help

For those of us who complain about fitting our color television, hi-fi stereo system, VCR, computer and clothes into our "cramped" rooms and apartments, maybe it's time we took a look at the way some of our neighbors in Harrisonburg live.

The story of the Dimick family should remind us of the things we should be grateful for, like heat, food and a roof over our heads. The Dimicks — a husband, wife and eight children — live in an old school bus in someone else's yard. They have no running water, no steady source of shelter and no guarantee of a future.

Most of us think of homelessness as a big city problem. When we take a trip to Washington, D.C. or New York, we aren't surprised to see people pushing their shopping carts up the streets, begging for money or sleeping over a warm grate.

But homelessness isn't just a problem for the big city. Attracted by the number of jobs the poultry industry provides in the area, many people come to Rockingham County hoping to get a job. But openings are scarce, and they find themselves not only without a job, but also without a home and out of luck.

Leroy Dimick is fairly lucky. He was able to find another job. Because of this income, he and his wife can afford to send their children in school.

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of life which cause human

the General Assembly to give that much money.

"The number-one priority for higher education is money for salaries and if we can address that it will be a major coup, given the current economic

useless for them to even put their names on a waiting list. Local private organizations, like Mercy House, also have long waiting lists and can't accommodate all the people who need a place to stay.

So meanwhile, families like the Dimicks suffer. They go without adequate shelter and proper nutrition while hoping for a better home. But the best won't come without the caring of others.

We can all learn from local homeless advocate Dick Randel's example. At JMU and in the community, there are many ways we can help. One way is by making donations to soup kitchens and private organizations. But money is just one way of giving.

Students can also donate of their time and energy. Through the Center for Service Learning, students can help the families at Mercy House. Another program called HOUSE — Housing Opportunities Uniting Students and Educators — sponsors events to increase awareness of homelessness and to feed the hungry all year. And Habitat for Humanity is always in search of volunteers to help build houses for the homeless.

Don't let another family like the Dimicks slip through the cracks. Take a little money out of your pocket, or some time out of your busy schedule to help those whose money and time are running out.

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CRAIG NEWMAN/THE BREEZE

Dick Randel talks about the homeless situation in Rockingham County as June Dimick listens. Randel lives in the house and the Dimicks park their bus in his front yard.

But the most pressing obstacle to people like the Dimicks is the lack of affordable housing, according Dr. Cecil Bradfield, a sociology professor.

He said that in Rockingham County, the homeless are often "invisible." Because it's a rural area, they live cars, buses and barns.

A lot of the homelessness stems from people like the Dimicks who come to this area looking for jobs where there are none, Bradfield said.

And Randel said that many people who do have

jobs can't find or can't afford housing.

He said that as long as people continue to ignore the homeless, the problem will never go away.

"They're out there," Randel said. "The question is, do you really want to see them, do you really want to know about them?"

To help the Dimicks, call Trissels Mennonite Church at (703) 896-7289, or contact Dick Randel at (703) 856-3506.

Corrections

About \$2,500 was spent on the university calendar distributed by Student Activities. Incorrect information was reported in the



"To the press alone, chequered as it is with abuses, the world is indebted for all the triumphs which have been gained by reason and humanity over error and oppression."

James Madison

Local homeless efforts fight national crisis

by Brian Tetro
contributing writer

Many people assume homelessness plagues only America's largest cities. However, Harrisonburg is not immune to this national problem and has in fact been faced with a growing number of homeless people in recent years.

John Elledge, executive director of Mercy House, a homeless shelter in Harrisonburg, said, "It has been a serious problem since the mid '80s and has grown somewhat in recent years."

Exact figures on the number of homeless people in Harrisonburg were not available, but Mercy House has been providing shelter for the homeless since 1987.

"We approach it not as a housing problem but as a people problem where we deal with the individual," Elledge said. "We assist the individual and offer them the skills needed to live independently in society."

Mercy House offers a rehabilitative program that works to secure jobs, education, child care and transportation for the homeless.

Elledge said, "We're reversing the trend by not simply giving them money. We spread a message of trying to help the individual to become well in society through family values and a good work ethic."

Harvey Yoder, pastor at Family's Hope Church in Harrisonburg and past member of the Board of Mercy House, said he believes that homelessness has been alleviated through Mercy House and other organizations in the area.

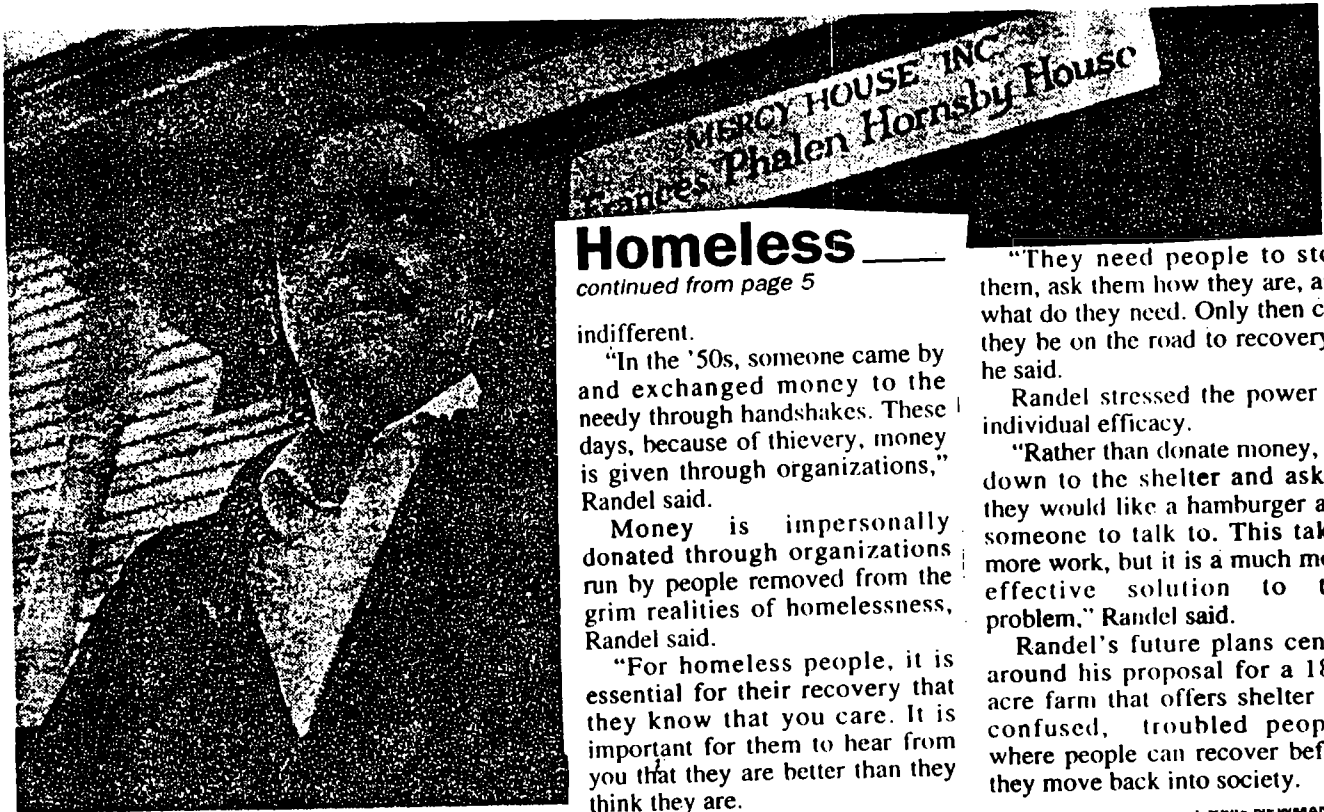
"There has definitely been an improvement in combating homelessness in Harrisonburg," he said. "The influx of inexpensive housing in the area allows many homeless the opportunity for housing at cheap rent."

Despite the progressive policies of Mercy House, homelessness in Harrisonburg continues to be a problem.

For Dick Randel, a formerly homeless person who helped found of Mercy House in 1987, the homeless organizations of Harrisonburg have not taken the proper methods needed to ensure a solution for the problem.

"After the homeless go through the program at Mercy House, they are back on the street again. How is that helpful to their needs?" Randel said.

Randel said he believes the organizers of homeless



Dean Hunsberger, director of client services at Mercy House, a homeless refuge in the Harrisonburg area.

organizations are often not run by people attuned to the problem.

"The people who run the homeless organizations in Harrisonburg are not homeless nor have they been homeless. How can these organizations be effective when they are run by people who cannot relate to the problem?" Randel said.

According to June Dimick, mother of a Harrisonburg family who was recently successful in her battle against homelessness, "I have had experiences with people from both ends. While those that have experienced homelessness are often better at helping you, I still appreciate those without experience still trying to help."

Homeless

continued from page 5

indifferent.

"In the '50s, someone came by and exchanged money to the needy through handshakes. These days, because of thievery, money is given through organizations," Randel said.

Money is impersonally donated through organizations run by people removed from the grim realities of homelessness, Randel said.

"For homeless people, it is essential for their recovery that they know that you care. It is important for them to hear from you that they are better than they think they are.

"They need people to stop them, ask them how they are, and what do they need. Only then can they be on the road to recovery," he said.

Randel stressed the power of individual efficacy.

"Rather than donate money, go down to the shelter and ask if they would like a hamburger and someone to talk to. This takes more work, but it is a much more effective solution to the problem," Randel said.

Randel's future plans center around his proposal for a 180-acre farm that offers shelter for confused, troubled people, where people can recover before they move back into society.

CRAG NEWMAN

For Randel, life has been a constant upward struggle against poverty since he lost his job in 1984. Without friends or relatives to turn to for support, Randel aimlessly traveled the country searching for jobs and sustenance. Now, he is no longer homeless and is employed by Shenandoah Growers, a greenhouse company.

"I went through many years of being homeless and I sympathize with these people," Randel said.

Randel said he is disheartened that the growing national mood toward homelessness has been callous and

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Madison Scholar delivers speech
on effects of hate communication

SGA proposal calls for student
input on restructuring through

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3/24/95

ADVOCACY (WHY)

I came into this world at the inception of W.W. II.
My childhood knew no hunger but knew of the pain of war.
Ducking under school desks with the fears of mass destruction.

Then came the Korean conflict. I was learning of life
and what it meant, the strength of families and friends,
learning the experiences of relatives dying in these events.

I remember the joy of my first car. The preparation and
readiness to step out into the world with all its prosperity
awaiting me. The education in life I had received to this
point had taught me what we as a people can do to prepare the
way for future generations.

There was going to be peace and prosperity again. We had
a new, young President. The sign on the wall read, 'We want
You.' So I went. Capitol Hill was yelling, 'Communism here,
communism there.' The President said to the Russians, 'Get
the missiles out of Cuba.' I suddenly realized I was going to
be one of the ones to do the getting. At that point I also
realized I was the past generation and not the new future.
I had become a part of saving the world from its own annihilation.
A new thinking process had entered. How can there
ever be peace with so many angry and oppressed people in the
world.

Civil Rights issues were being raised in Georgia, so I took my interest there. A voice in the South stood out from all the voices and that voice was Martin Luther King. Among my own family and friends there was division on Civil Rights. I heard, "They have housing, they have jobs, they have schools, so what more do they want? Their part of this country."

I needed to know, was it true or wasn't it true. What the states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, etc. were doing I was told, 'Is none of your business what we do, its our state, our people. We do what we want. There's just a few dissidents making noise about nothing.'

I learned quickly that it wasn't a black and white issue, it was rich and poor. African Americans in the South wanted equal access to jobs, schools, housing, opportunities, etc... They wanted the right to vote for what they wanted to vote for. The untruths of generations was starting to unravel. A new civil war was beginning. They were coming in with cameras instead of guns. They were starting to show this country and the world man's inhumanity to man in the great country of the red, white and blue.

In the backdrop was the skirmish of Vietnam and then to my shock and the world's, our President was assassinated.

A new President was sworn in. Would he stand tall I remember thinking or would he try to roll back the clock.

African Americans in the South were yelling, 'help us', the Vietmese were yelling, 'help us'. So over the next few

years cameras were leaving the South and heading overseas.

Now some inroads into Civil Rights were being made because of a candle that stayed lit day and night. As I found myself torn between Vietnam and Civil Rights, the one candle that stood out in the darkness of that era was snuffed out.

Life went on and I went on. The war ended. Civil rights went to negotiating tables. For the next fifteen years there was relative peace. I pursued the American Dream, marriage, children, a place I would call home.

Then in came the New Deal. In the mid-eighties, a big sucking sound came across our country. The country stopped growing. Greed and self-centeredness had begun rearing its ugly head. In the Mid-West the foundation started to crumble. There was no more assurance of a future. First went the farms sucked in at auction by bigger farms. Then went the small businesses sucked in by corporations. It blew across the Plains so fast few saw it coming. Then went the banks, taken over by bigger banks. There was a great exodus at this time from the Mid-West heading to the North, East and West. We lost everything.

My thoughts now turned to the building of the Roman Empire. There were now Corporate Farms, Corporate Businesses, Corporate Banks and Corporate Churches. My thoughts went back to the Civil War with the Carpetbaggers. As myself and my family travelled looking for what we'd lost all we found was pain and suffering, discrimination and harsh judgment.

The judgments came when I asked for a decent wage so I could afford to put a roof over our heads and food on our table, basic necessities of human life.

My thoughts were now taken back to the Great Depression. I wanted to know the man's name who robbed my dignity and self-respect, the man who is enslaving my hours for little pay, the man who is telling me to tell my wife to get a job. I found out that I was a slave without a master but with many masters. A decent job would open and a hundred people would show up, all qualified, so I was not alone.

For the next couple of years we were nomads. The great sucking sound was still going on. More businesses were closing, more banks were folding. Then a blessing came our way. Homeless, destitute, with no where to turn we were given a chance to run a Motel, quaint but a little run down. It was a no pay position but with free housing. Three months later the great sucking sound hit the Motel. The owner of this property was about to learn he had survived to this point. We knew the wind and the beginning of the great sucking sound.

Then came the Succupis who was the Corporate Bank. Knowing it was there and learning how to appease it, I knew it wasn't going to get us this time.

It told me that this property was not mine to offer up, its owned by others, so step aside and let us have him. I had asked the owners of the property since the foreclosure had started that although I might not be able to save it, I could stop it for now if they allowed me to. They agreed.

Now the Succupis had to deal with me and me alone. I went and offered it the one thing it nourishes and thrives upon--Money. I offered up \$350.00 a week to leave the Motel alone. The man dealing with me said, "Hold on", and went into another room. He returned ten minutes later. He said, "We would be in agreement at \$500.00 a week. Payment to be made before 11:00 every Monday morning. My family and I now had a home and Motel.

It spread through the air like a whisper--"Sanctuary", and they came. First from the streets they came, then from surrounding areas, then from other states. They were us. Husband, wife and children with nothing except the clothes on their backs. If you were strong enough to work, work you obtained. But if you were life-wearied, disallusioned, you were given rest. The question was not for how long, each person, each family was different in many ways. They all had the same story to tell of the great sucking sound. As each got strong, they moved on, back to do battle on an hourly existence.

Some of those in the community who were not affected by the sucking sound got together with me and had an awakening to the realization that it was out there and it could get them at a point that they could no longer feed it. So, collectively they opened a shelter from the cold and the sucking sound. And the shelter was called Mercy House. Its primary function is to teach those who enter to feed the sucking sound-Money. And if your lucky enough to enslave your wife and children and

be still and quiet about the sucking sound, it will leave you alone.

Then some three years later the sucking sound came through the electric wires of the Motel. By this time hundreds had been helped to carry on. Again at the door was the Succupis. This time his strength had grown. He was not the Corporate Bank anymore. He was now total energy usurped from the Corporate Electric Company. He said, "It doesn't matter what good you think your doing for anyone, you owe, you'll pay. We offered him our departure if he would leave the Motel operational. He agreed, we left. We went back on the road.

For over a year we saw pain and suffering which was much worse. The poor were robbing the poor to survive. The banks were being bailed out for billions of dollars. Even the Government now was not immune. There was talk of building bigger prisons, bigger educational networks. The great sucking sound was still roaring, looking for its next targets.

In 1991, we were given a chance again to stop. This time we settled into a mountainside overlooking a Valley. We have a view of a lake at our front door. I work one minute from where I live but we're weary from the battle. The great sucking sound is all around but we're being left alone right now. I earn it-the sucking sound takes it, I accept that to be reality.

The American Dream I dreamt as a child, the American Nightmare we live. The man I work for works for the great sucking sound. He's given us a place to live. Recently he had come to me and said, "The problem I have with you is that your a good worker but you have no fear. If I was to kick you out on the

street you would lose nothing because you own nothing."

I answered him, "That's why we're better off than you. You'll always live in fear of not having enough money to feed the Succupis."

He is one of those and there are many who have been deceived by the Succupis into believing we're a part of the sucking sound that he's beginning to hear.

Its not happenchance that you've heard from me. I will protect and fight for the right of any human being to be born and to live, whether in or out of wedlock. I will fight the lie that there is no sucking sound. We will walk tall and free without shackles and chains. A great man said, "Free at last, Free at last, Free at last." Living in a world of fear, humanity being pitted one against another and here we stand in the way, eye to eye, toe to toe. They say "Move", and believe I will because they have more education, more wealth, more power of law. I will move when they learn the courtesy of the word, PLEASE.

C/D/C

DR Tell-Tale signs of the sucking sound;you open an envelope in the mail, the letter inside states, "Did you forget us this month?" Are you one paycheck away from becoming homeless? The statement-"Your account has been overdrawn!"

Note: Poverty, Oppression, Disallusionment, fear of failure;Overcome by real opportunity without strings,Respect, Non-Judgment, Advocacy.