

EASTSIDE'S 1ST SHELTER FOR HOMELESS MEN IS A MOVING REFUGE

*By NANCY MONTGOMERY October 26, 1993 Publication: THE SEATTLE TIMES
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BELLEVUE - Not everybody walked or rode the bus to the Eastside's first shelter for homeless men, although most, like the former pizza deliveryman, did.

The out-of-work cartographer rode his bike to the facilities at Temple De Hirsch Sinai, in the heart of residential Bellevue.

And the out-of-work businessman drove his Mercedes. It's an old Mercedes, he pointed out, a remnant of more prosperous times, before the disastrous land deal and the divorce. He plans to sell it after he fixes little things wrong with it.

In the meantime, the shelter has made all the difference for him in the six weeks since he came to Bellevue looking for work. "I didn't have any other place to stay," he said, in his khakis and haircut straight out of an ad for The Gap.

The shelter program started operating last month, after 18 months of planning and fund-raising by the Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council, a consortium of local churches and synagogues. The idea was to provide an evening snack, a place to sleep and breakfast for homeless men on the Eastside, instead of having to refer them

to a Seattle shelter, where many did not want to go.

Nobody knows how many homeless there are on the Eastside, although it's certain that the dozen or so men who are turning up regularly at the new overnight-shelter program are only a tiny fraction of the total. Last year, the Multi Service Center of North and East King County placed 500 people in motels because they couldn't keep up with the mortgage, or rent, and had no place else to live. The agency put 500 others in emergency shelters.

A limited number of services exist to help homeless families - the YMCA Family Village in Redmond, for example, with transitional housing for as many as 20 families at a time, and the Kirkland Interfaith Transitions in Housing program, which recently opened a 12-unit complex.

The new rotating shelter, however, is the first Eastside place for homeless men to stay overnight.

After United Way last year denied the interfaith council's request for a \$100,000 grant to staff and run the program, proponents began to work the phones all over the Eastside. They called 161 congregations, raising \$42,000, and made financing requests of cities, businesses and charitable organizations.

A dozen congregations each agreed to house the men in their buildings from 9:30 p.m. to 7 a.m. every day for 30 days at a time - an arrangement that means no special permits are needed.

The doors opened Sept. 8 at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church.

Two men were screened by participating social-service organizations and came to spend the night. "Then we rapidly went to 15," said Nadine Shannon, chairwoman of the consortium's homeless-housing task force.

This month, the men, the manager and the sleeping mats moved to the temple. Bellevue First Congregational Church is next, and sites are lined up for the next year. One night last week, the eight men availing themselves of the service were greeted by site manager Sam Nosario, a training Pentecostal minister and former waiter who changed out of his suit into jeans upon his arrival, and by Ariel Pupka, a member of

the synagogue who volunteered to assist for a few hours.

There are no showers at the temple or the churches, and despite repeated efforts, staffers still have not been able to persuade any Eastside facility to let the men use their showers. Negotiations with the YMCA are continuing; in the meantime, baths are taken at the sink.

Joseph Bergeron was the first to arrive, smiling as he entered the large room with a piano and blackboard and children's art works covering the walls. He went into the kitchen and, selecting from cheeses and cold meats, fruit, chili, ice cream and other foods the congregation members provide each day, made himself a tuna sandwich.

Bergeron, 38, said he was a video producer and director in West Germany who went broke living in hotels after another local living arrangement fell through. Six weeks ago, in desperation, he called a social-service agency.

"They said, 'Sure, we can help you out,' " he recalled. "It was like a miracle. I just couldn't believe it. It saved my life, to be honest with you."

The shelter is enabling him to save enough money from a telephone-marketing job to eventually get an apartment. "I just want a little place to stay," he said, "a little roof over my head, and I'll go from there."

Jeffrey Harriman, 35, with glasses and long hair parted in the middle, came next. He said he has a "personality disorder" that prevents him from fitting in with people and keeping a job, and has estranged family members in Montana. "I've been homeless almost a year," he said, "living out of churches, living behind churches, in burned-out buildings, whatever I could find. If you don't got money, that's how it is."

Eric Lindstrom, 22, was the youngest at the shelter. He has had a drug and alcohol problem since his teens and was recently kicked out by his grandmother. He works for a contractor now, or, like Harriman, spends the day walking around. "I feel fairly comfortable here," he said. "I feel more or less like I'm a human being, not an animal."

At 10:30, the men took out their mats and plastic bags containing pillows and blankets and arranged them on the floor, but no one was ready for lights out. One man ate bowl after bowl of ice cream. Others chatted. Harriman paced, holding a cup of coffee. The

two former white-collar workers rested on their mats. The Mercedes owner, 47, read an inspirational book, occasionally making remarks to the 43-year-old former cartographer nearby.

The cartographer's is one of the more spectacular stories. He left his ex-wife in California and moved to a local motel. It was burned down in a robbery, so he lived in his car in Sears' parking lot. But police arrested him for a previous license suspension when they caught him moving the car, and they impounded it. The towing company then sold the car with all his possessions inside. - family photos and \$8,000 worth of cameras included. For a while after that, he lived in Marymoor Park, he says. His resume is circulating and for now he's employed at a Redmond manufacturing company, slowly paying off credit cards and court fees.

"Without the shelter I don't know where I would have ended up," he said. "It's basic and it's needed."

To learn more about the new Eastside rotating shelter for homeless men, call Ann Olds at Catholic Community Services,

643-1937.

STEVE RINGMAN / SEATTLE TIMES: EX-VIDEO PRODUCER JOSEPH BERGERON IS STAYING AT THE SHELTER AT BELLEVUE'S TEMPLE DE HIRSCH SINAI.
PHOTO

THE SEATTLE TIMES

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