

# Homeless: He'll 'clean out commodes to make a dollar'

By Susan Buck  
staff writer

**W**HILE STUDENTS at the Oakland Community College-Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills participated in the Sleep Out For the Homeless Friday night, the bona fide homeless showed up at the South Oakland Shelter (SOS) in Royal Oak.

One by one, they registered with the intake worker at the front desk. Then a church van shuttled them to St. Mary's School in Royal Oak, which is closed to students.

From September through June, 35 churches in the area host the homeless who come to the SOS shelter. Volunteers provide homecooking, a warm bed and an understanding heart.

Friday's homeless, mostly men, were joined by a few women. One woman, who refused to be interviewed, arrived with her 2-year-old son.

**HERE ARE** the stories of those who were willing to talk:

• "I'm here because I am a battered woman," said Joanne, who for safety reasons, refused to tell her last name.

Last week, Joanne left her home and her alcoholic boyfriend, who co-owns their house with her, after several years of physical and mental abuse, she said.

A short, neatly dressed woman, Joanne took great care in her appearance.

Her boyfriend recently received a sizable inheritance following his father's death, said Joanne, 42. The money went to his head and he became an animal, she said.

"I thought he was going to kill me on Christmas Day. I went flying



Joe Murray, who came to the South Oakland Shelter Sunday night, said he lost two businesses because of his alcoholism.

through the front door so fast that I went over a long cement porch and landed on the ground. When I got up, I was covered with blood."

According to Joanne, she went back into the house and he said: "You're not so pretty now, are you? You want some more, I'll give you some more. You deserve it."

Joanne said she kept a baseball bat near her bed for protection. When her boyfriend fell into a drunken stupor, last week, she took \$80 from his wallet, packed some clothes and left.

She planned to call an attorney Monday to regain her half of the house.

• Pete McDonald came to SOS with his buddy, Ron Bloise, for the first time Friday night. Shortly be-

fore, their landlord evicted them, without notice, from a house near Nevada and John R in Detroit. While living in the area, McDonald added that he was robbed by a street gang.

McDonald has two ex-wives and six children who, he said, think he's dead. Bloise still sees his children.

McDonald and Bloise work day labor and earn about \$25 a day. "I'll scrub windows, I'll clean out commodes — anything to make a dollar," said McDonald.

It's a team effort for the two men. Bloise, 56, has a truck; McDonald, 46, does not have transportation. Sometimes, they sleep in Bloise's truck, which holds their entire wardrobe.

"You never make enough to get a place," said McDonald. "There's a place down the street that charges \$25 a week, I think, for a room. But



Ron Bloise (left) and buddy Peter McDonald came to the South Oakland Shelter for the first time Friday night, shortly after their landlord in Detroit evicted them.

you need \$50 to get in. Fifty dollars is two days work and two days work is two days without eating. That's kind of hard," said McDonald.

"If you have ever slept under a tree in the middle of winter, you'd know what it was like to be homeless," said McDonald.

• Ron, 48, a former Birmingham resident, didn't want his last name used.

"This isn't my peer group," he said. Ron, who is divorced, is on his way out of the homeless life after a downward spiral with alcoholism that began at age 13, when he would

snatch beer bottles out of open garages and from a market where he worked.

"I have a B. A. in marketing from Michigan State and was working on my master's degree but I am an alcoholic." At one time he owned his own company, he said.

His mother and son took on a Toughlove approach, which worked, he said.

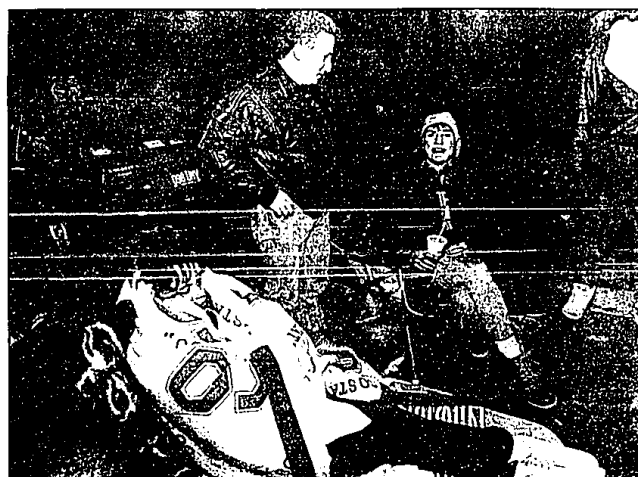
"I still would be looking for an easy way out, if they hadn't slapped me in the face with a two by four," said Ron.

• Joe Murray, 45, is an experi-

enced street person but he's not hard-hearted. He spoke with concern about a young girl, about 16, who came to the SOS shelter Sunday night, clutching her teddy bear.

A former Warren resident, he lost two businesses because of his alcoholism, he said.

"It eats you up to see an ad for a job in the suburbs but you can't get there because you have no transportation," said Murray. "You have no idea what it's like to be homeless, to sleep in cardboard boxes for months and months. You learn to swallow your pride."



Theresa Granger (left) of Detroit, David Cohen of West Bloomfield and Cindy Sukockas of Farmington Hills were among the OCC students taking part in the Sleep Out for the Homeless.

## Students lend helping hand

Continued from Page 1

ley of Walled Lake, the OCC student who chaired the event. "One person mentioned the idea and it just snowballed."

Other student organizers, Dan Dunne of Livonia and C.J. Van Weelden of Birmingham, were also on hand to kick off the gathering, which started at 7 p.m. Friday night and ended at 6 a.m. Saturday morning.

THE STUDENTS tried to create, as much as possible, the conditions of the homeless. In addition to trash barrel fires, cardboard boxes covered with plastic to shield cold winds were set up in the parking lot.

"Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," a Beatles album, played in the background.

The efforts of Students Against Hunger, a group within the student government, got the ball rolling for the weekend project.

THE FIRST Saturday of every month, Students Against Hunger makes and delivers meals to St. Leo's, a soup kitchen in downtown Detroit, said Rose Kotzen, OCC campus minister who joined the students Friday night.

"I'm going to spend the night but I don't know if I will sleep," Kotzen-

ski said. "I'm just going to try and stay warm."

While SOS has a permanent office site in Royal Oak, actual nighttime lodging of the homeless is voluntary.

ly rotated among 35 churches in the area — including St. Alexander Catholic Church and Trinity Episcopal Church, both in Farmington Hills — as well as locations in Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills.

## Dancers host choreographer

Oakland Community College's Harbinger Dance Company hosted Douglas Nielsen as guest choreographer Feb. 13-17.

Nielsen, on the faculty of University of Arizona's Department of Dance and founder of Douglas Nielsen Dancers, has presented original choreography in several countries throughout the world and across the United States.

He recently returned from China, where he was invited to be the first male guest teacher at the Guozhou Dance Academy.

Nielsen set "Long Story Short" for Harbinger Dance Company to be included in the company repertoire. "Set" is a dance term meaning "to teach to," according to Jennifer Johnston, company manager. "Long Story Short" will be performed at the Music Hall in Harbinger's spring concert April 21 and 22.

Harbinger also offered open master classes with Douglas Nielsen.

Harbinger Dance Company is in residence at OCC's Orchard Ridge Campus, Farmington Hills.

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