



Breaking bread: Program volunteers sit down with homeless people from New York City for dinner. From left are Tracey Gies, a Central Michigan University student who hails from Farmington Hills, Charlie, CMU student Alayne Cairns, Stan, and Brenda Ringwald, also a CMU student.

Hungry no more: Sharing a meal and a smile at Chips Soup Kitchen in Brooklyn, N.Y., are program member Merondje Denis, from the University of Dallas, and a homeless boy, Vincent.

What did you do on your spring break?

Farmington High grad uses time off to help homeless in NYC

BY TRACEY GIES
SPECIAL WRITER

When you think of the homeless and impoverished in the United States, what comes to mind? Do you see a dirty beggar on the street corner? Or do you hear the stult of a drunkard answering imaginary questions?

In all honesty, when faced with the same question, these very images and sounds came to my mind — until the homeless, themselves, touched my heart.

For the second year, I traded in the traditional spring break celebration for a life-changing experience — Alternative Spring Break (ASB).

An increasingly popular option, ASB programs allow college students across the nation to volunteer with various non-profit organizations. And each year, the positive impact of ASB proves that college students are not America's future, but America's today.

This past spring break, I worked in New York City with the Youth Service Opportunities Project (YSOP). Our team of Central Michigan University students worked in conjunction with students from Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Mich. and the Uni-



Help: Tracey Gies spent her spring break in New York City helping the homeless through a program called Alternative Spring Break.

versity of Dallas. Our work group served in two soup kitchens, a clothing warehouse and a furniture warehouse, often working in the poorest neighbor-

hoods of Brooklyn.

During the week, the 30 of us served more than 4,000 homeless people — who in turn served us.

It did not take long to realize that the homeless and impoverished look and sound entirely different when armed with names, faces and undeniable personalities.

A "homeless elderly man" is entirely different from Charlie, whose witty jokes and hearty laugh were much like my grandfather's.

A "former drug addict and seller" is not the same as the man who worked alongside us at the clothing warehouse — the man who despises the tattooed arms that haunt him about his past and who cried when discussing the eight-year-old daughter who waits for his prison sentence to end.

A "homeless child" is different from the adorable little Vincent whose affectionate father insisted that his son's smiling face was wiped clean before I took my photo.

The sad fact is that homeless children like Vincent are not uncommon. In fact, the average age of a homeless person in New York City is nine and more than 1,000 children enter the NYC homeless shelter system each month. Currently,

I also think of how intelligent many of the homeless were that we encountered. Some of "them" even had master's or doctorate degrees and most had family members living comfortably in another part of the country.'

more than 5,000 families live in NYC emergency housing and the numbers are growing.

So, today when I think of the homeless and impoverished, I think of "Vincent's" and "Charlies." I think of how easily anyone could become one of "them" and how hopeless it seems inside the vicious cycle of poverty. As one client put it, "Eventually, the street takes us all."

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As with past volunteer experiences, I felt a bit guilty by the close of the week. Although I traveled to New York City to help others, it was often ambiguous who was serving whom. I will never forget

one homeless woman to whom I handed a cup of juice. When I casually asked, "How are you today Ma'am?" She looked me in the eyes and immediately answered, "Blessed."

I strongly urge all of you who are interested in making a positive difference in the world and in yourself to seek out programs like ASB. You won't regret it!

Tracey M. Gies graduated from Farmington High School in 1997 and is currently a junior at Central Michigan University. ASB at Central is a student run program and is financially supported by student fund-raisers. Donations are always greatly appreciated. Checks can be made to "United Way" and sent to: CMU Volunteer & Service Learning Center, BUC 104, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859.

Hills to start a Web site in the fall

BY JONI HUBRED
STAFF WRITER

jhubred@ee.homecomm.net

It won't be long now before Farmington Hills becomes another "dot-com" city.

Officials have contracted with Sequoia, a networking and integration services company based in Auburn Hills, to develop a five-year Internet plan and establish the city's presence on the World Wide Web. According to Central Services Director Michael Lasley, the search for a consultant involved an extensive interviewing process that included interviews and site visits conducted by city staff.

"Initially, the Web site will be located at this firm, not at city hall," Lasley said.

Sequoia, he said, is well-versed in Web site development, having hosted sites for the Palace of Auburn Hills, the Detroit Pistons and other notable clients. Working with city staff, the company will develop a master plan, which will eventually enable the Web site for "e-commerce," or the ability to make payments and transact other business electronically.

"We'd like to include as much service as we can for residents," Lasley said.

Sequoia President Bill Murray said the first phase of the plan will include a "static" Web site, which will act as a sort of electronic "brochure" to get out a

8:00 a.m. Department Meeting

9:00 a.m. Status Meeting

10:00 a.m. Marketing Meeting

11:00 a.m. Committee Meeting

12:00 p.m. Parent-Teacher Meeting

1:00 p.m. Staff Meeting

2:00 p.m. Technology Meeting

3:00 p.m. Finance Meeting

4:00 p.m. Subcommittee Meeting

5:00 p.m. Board Meeting

5:55 p.m. Check account balance. Pay bills online.

6:00 p.m. "Reduce number of meetings" Meeting

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