

THE HOMELESS VOICE

FLORIDAS LARGEST STREET NEWSPAPER

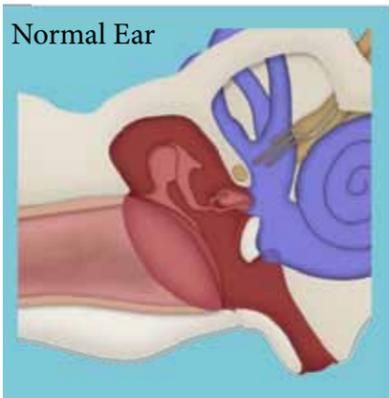


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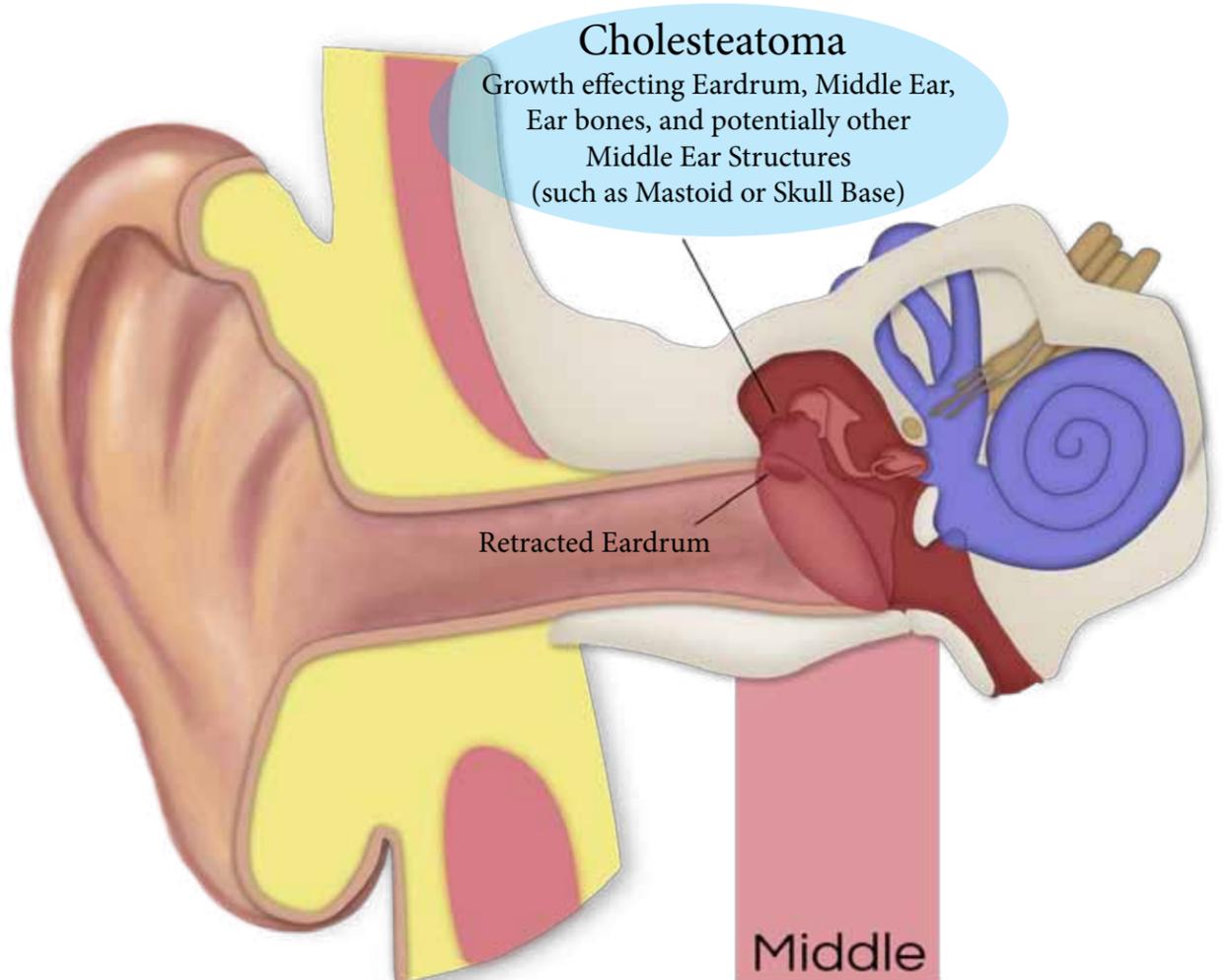
How A Simple Ear Infection Can Make You Homeless



The author post surgery



Normal Ear



Sean Cononie
Every once in a while I say people can become homeless for things that are not in their control. Read below how a simple ear infection can cause severe damage to your hearing which can get you fired from your job.
Not only can you lose your hearing and your job what about your life? Well that too. I almost died about ten years ago from an ear infection that went to my brain-meningitis was the culprit. Who would have thought that someone who has a lot of ear infections can have the infection still in their ear eating away at their bones? Once that infection eats away a thin liner of the bone then comes the brain and that same infection that you had many years ago may now go to the brain infecting your brain causing meningitis. So read below and if you or your kids had lots of ear infections go to a doc and ask them about this. A CAT or a MRI can pick up the infection and if it is in your bones you must get treatment. You heard me say this in the past, "You must be your own Doctor these days." Verify and ask questions. Do yourself a favor get the medical records from your doctor visits and read all the notes and tests and ask questions it might just save your life. Below is what I had done to me and it is present in a lot of people who have had chronic ear infections. If your kid is very sick and has a high fever ask your ER doc if Menin-

Cholesteatoma is the most serious form of chronic ear infection.

gitis is possible?
Cholesteatoma (ker-less-tea-a-toe-ma) is a progressive destructive ear disease. Most cases occur in children and young adults, but it can affect any age. Skin builds up in layers and erodes the bone of the middle ear and mastoid. In its early stages, cholesteatoma tends to attack the ossicles, the small bones conducting sound from the eardrum to the inner ear. This causes partial deafness, sometimes with unpleasant smelling discharge and pain. If the disease progresses, it can erode the inner ear causing total and permanent deafness and tinnitus. The inner ear also contains the balance organ. If cholesteatoma erodes into the balance organ, vertigo, a severe form of dizziness, results. Cholesteatoma can also attack the facial nerve causing facial paralysis. In rare cases the disease erodes upwards. The roof of the ear is the floor of the brain. If this thin plate of bone is breached, meningitis, brain abscess and death can result. The cholesteatoma is made of layers of dead skin, like an onion. Only the outer layer, known as the matrix, contains live growing skin cells. Cholesteatoma is the most serious form of chronic ear infection. It is not a tumor, though it can behave like one. It is not cancer and never spreads widely throughout the body – though it can cause quite enough trouble by its local destructive effects. In most cases, the progress of cholesteatoma is slow. It can take years or even decades to eat its way slowly through the structures of the ear. Rapidly progressive disease, over a time course of a few months and sometimes weeks, is commoner in children and in the presence of active acute infection.

- In recent years, scientists have identified the characteristics of people most likely to suffer recurrent middle ear infections:
- * Males
 - * Individuals with a family history of ear infections
 - * Babies who are bottle-fed (breastfed babies get fewer ear infections)
 - * Children in day care centers
 - * People living in households with tobacco smokers
 - * People with abnormalities of the palate, such as a cleft palate
 - * People with poor immune systems or chronic respiratory diseases, such as cystic fibrosis and asthma

~Monthly Angels~

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About the Homeless Voice

The Homeless Voice houses, feeds, and finds jobs for anyone who is homeless. We serve up to 500 homeless daily and serve over 45,000 meals each month.

The Homeless Voice distributes a street newspaper in all major cities throughout Florida including Tallahassee, Lake City, Jacksonville, Tampa, Orlando, Daytona, Ft. Lauderdale, and Miami.

The Homeless Voice Newspaper has three functions.

- 1-Educate the public on homelessness and poverty issues
- 2-Provide temporary employment to those without a job
- 3-Raise additional funds for the Florida based shelter

We have grown into a multifaceted agency that feeds, shelters, and arranges for each homeless person to receive the necessary access to social and noncompulsory religious services to enable a return to a self-reliant lifestyle.

For the small percentage of people incapable of living independent lives, we provide a caring and supportive environment for their long-term residency.



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A Crackdown on the Poor and Hungry

Dennis J Bernstein

Activist and author Keith McHenry, who co-founded Food Not Bombs in Boston in 1980, says cities across the U.S. have begun to take various steps to “criminalize” the homeless and those who try to help them.

Homeless folks gather at sunset. Santa Cruz, CA. 2007. (Flickr Franco Folini)

I spoke to McHenry, author of *Hungry for Peace: How You Can Help End Poverty and War with Food Not Bombs*, in the seaside city of Santa Cruz, California, where he says there is an ongoing crackdown against Food Not Bombs workers as well as those who they are trying to feed.

“The most common government response to the suffering of those being forced into homelessness is for local authorities to make laws against being homeless,” said McHenry. “Laws against sleeping, sitting, asking for money or what officials call ‘Quality of Life Crimes,’ living outside and lower[ing] the quality of life of those fortunate enough to not yet be forced out into the streets.

“Another [tactic] is to pass laws seeking to end the sharing of meals to the hungry in public ... hoping that by hiding the ‘problem’ of seeing so many of our neighbors living [on the streets], it will go away. Over 70 cities have passed laws regulating or banning the sharing of free food with the homeless outside.”

According to a recent report from the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, 21.8 percent of the nation’s children and 15 percent of the population overall are poor and often hungry. Despite the growing needs of the homeless, the Federal government continues to cut vital services and assistance meant to help the most at-risk among us, said Jennifer Jones, Executive Director of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA), including “funding cuts for meals for homebound seniors, vocational training programs for those who’ve lost their jobs, food for low income families, and the list goes on. At a time when our nation needs to protect people from continued and increasing hardship, and support economic growth, the Federal government has imposed sequestration cuts and proposes further budget cuts that take us backwards.”

According to the National Center on Family Homelessness, using the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education and the 2013 U.S. Census, at least “2.5 million children in America — one in every 30 children — go to sleep without a home of their own each year.”

I spoke to Keith McHenry in Santa Cruz on Feb. 23 about the continuing attacks on those who have devoted themselves to distributing free food to the poor, homeless and hungry.

Dennis Bernstein: Please talk a little bit in general

about what you do in terms of trying to give out food. And a bit about how the need for food has increased in recent years.

Keith McHenry: Recently, I’ve been involved in this project called the Freedom Sleepers, with the right for people to sleep in Santa Cruz. And it’s illegal now to sleep here between the hours of 11 at night and 8:30 in the morning, outside, in a vehicle, or in the streets, or anywhere in the parks.

And the number of people that you see coming to our meals, it’s just always getting larger and larger. And downtown Santa Cruz, like many ... downtowns—L.A., I was just down there—it’s incredible the amount of people living on America’s street.

There’s a study that just was reported in the Washington Post... and several articles about homeless children. There’s estimated to be, using the federal government’s own statistics, 2.5 million homeless children in America.

The Food Not Bombs logo, designed by Keith McHenry. According to FNB, “The leaves of the carrot were drawn to represent the torch of liberty and the fist idea was a symbol borrowed from the left idea of united we are strong as in the logo of Students for a Democratic Society. The hand is purple to represent all the races of the world.”

DB: ...2.5 million homeless children.

KM: It’s just astounding. It’s heartbreaking. To me, it’s starting to have that sense of [Charles] Dickens, or the Great Depression, or something like that.

DB: ...sort of the look of the Third World, because you begin to see more and more whole families on the street.

KM: Absolutely. And you see entire little villages, and camps. And so, Food Not Bombs, and many other groups, are out on the streets serving free food. And what we do is we collect free food that can’t be sold from grocery stores, and we make

vegan meals that we share on the streets, under a banner that says Food Not Bombs, with a literature table with information.

But Food Not Bombs in America has been having tons of trouble, as well. And, most recently, Tampa, Florida, arrested seven volunteers. But the outrage, world-wide, was just so huge that the district attorney dropped the charges.

The reality is, you don’t need a permit to do this. We don’t get paid. It’s just a gift... an unregulated gift of love. And it would be like trying to issue permits for people doing anything to help their community, out of their own free will. Fortunately, we’ve been able to push back, attack after attack. Orlando, Ft. Lauderdale, Arcata, California, San Francisco, and now there’s even efforts in Southern California and some of those small cities, like Corona, where they’re trying to outlaw outdoor distribution of free food.



High End Recklessness

Torran King

In the first week of the Waste Management Phoenix Open, the biggest golf party on the planet, homeowners in one of the most luxurious cities in the U.S. (Scottsdale) experienced frustration on a level that is, quite common throughout the country!

I work for a company that provided security at many different events including this one. Working alongside Scottsdale Police department at the private vehicle entrance where only Golfers, Caddies, Sponsors, and local residents are able to enter with special passes, I encountered many disgruntled residents. Because this is the biggest golf party of the year, many young people attended, such as, ASU students and locals. Party limousines and busses rolled in with thousands of them, so many that several times we had to shut down the road because the busses could not turn around and were releasing their patrons in the middle of the streets causing major traffic jams. This happened the entire event. Finally, the last few days, fatigue and too many drinks seemed to take its toll as many of the people leaving the limos and busses started to urinate on residential property. Many condo owners in the area complained to Scottsdale police and myself. Arrests were made through the week, but nowhere near the amount necessary to catch all the offenders.

Most people think that because this event is a “Professional Tournament” that most golf fans are reserved and behave graciously. Wrong, guess again, people in cities all around the U.S. have experienced homeless problems. Most people think that it is only the homeless who urinate on their properties. Statistics show that most citations for public urination result from drunk patrons at local events. Check the arrest reports yourselves for most major events where drinking is involved.

So the next time you think that “only homeless people” would urinate in places like your back yard, please remember that this plague is not so uncommon.

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~Pope Francis

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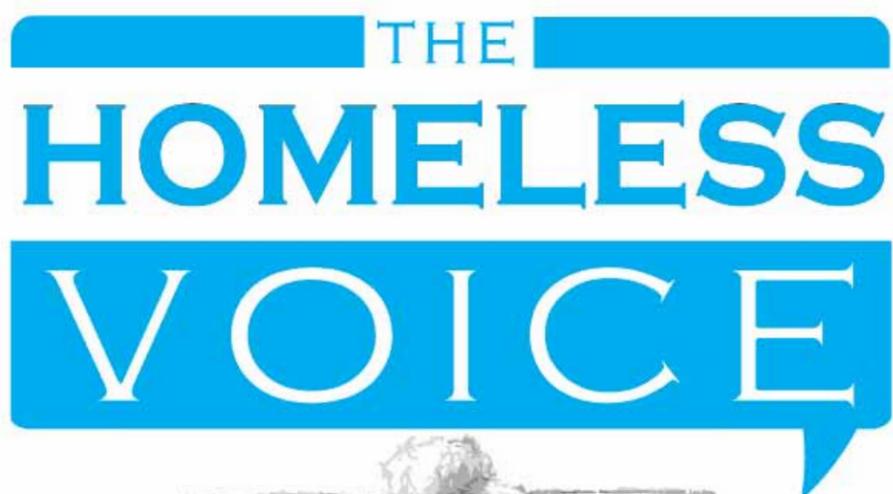
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6 ‘Homeless Jesus’ finds its place

Jonathan M. Pitts The Baltimore Sun

Living in small-town Canada, Timothy P. Schmalz is usually sheltered from the societal ills that plague many major cities. So when he visited inner-city Toronto and happened on a homeless person sleeping on a park bench five years ago, the sight left him shaken.

It also inspired him.

Schmalz, a Christian artist, saw the figure under the blanket as the presence of Jesus. He sculpted the scene in bronze, giving the figure wounds on both feet. Replicas of his statue are now on display — and generating reaction and comment — in historic settings in more than 60 cities, including Indianapolis; Dublin, Ireland; and Rome, where it stands on the grounds of the Vatican.

Baltimore is getting its own version of “Homeless Jesus” on Ash Wednesday when Archbishop William E. Lori unveils and blesses the life-sized wood-and-resin statue at a 12:10 p.m. Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

The Baltimore Archdiocese will make the statue available for churches and schools in the area to borrow throughout Lent — the 40-day period of prayer and fasting many Christians observe before Easter — and beyond.

Once every site that wants to borrow this version of “Homeless Jesus” has had the chance to do so, the archdiocese will return it to Schmalz, who will supply a full-fledged bronze model for permanent display on the grounds of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in downtown Baltimore.

The full-sized permanent work measures about 8 feet in length and features a frail-looking individual asleep on a park bench, the face and body covered by a blanket, bare feet protruding.

A space remains on the bench where visitors may sit.

Only the wounds on the figure’s feet establish an overt link to Jesus, but they’re enough to attract passers-by and inspire discussion.

Newspaper articles from around the world describe individuals stopping at the statue and debating its meaning. Some deride it as an unwanted magnet for homeless people or an unflattering depiction of Jesus. Others call it a powerful evocation of his frequent reminders to followers that they should help the poor, the hungry and the disenfranchised.

Schmalz himself said he sees it as conjuring Matthew 25, a gospel passage in which Jesus declares that whatever we do to “the least of these,” we do to him.

Lori said the statue hits the mark in that respect.

“I think the piece does what the artist intended, which is to stop you in your tracks, to make you recognize a very human reality in our city,” he said. “I also think that it makes you open your eyes when you actually are out and about in the city and you see flesh-and-blood homeless people in the streets.

“It helps us to remind us that in welcoming the poor, the sick, the homeless, the immigrant — that in welcoming them we welcome Jesus.”

Archdiocese officials declined to disclose the price of the bronze statue, but versions of “Homeless Jesus” on display in other cities have cost as much as \$40,000. An anonymous donor purchased the permanent statue on behalf of the archdiocese.

Schmalz said the archdiocese was his first customer to ask for a “portable” version to share in a variety of places.

The artist donated the wood-and-resin “pilgrim” model that Baltimoreans will be able to see at least through the fall.

“I love the idea that Baltimore is doing this: ‘Let’s get this park bench into different areas around the city,’” he said.

A lifelong Catholic, Schmalz, 47, of tiny St. Jacobs, Ontario, has been creating works of public art for three decades, most of it Christian-themed.

He showed up on the Vatican’s radar when he was in his 30s after a sculpture he made of the Holy Family appeared in more than 40 states. A handful of American bishops brought the work to the attention of Pope John Paul II, who blessed it shortly before he died in 2005. The Vatican commissioned five more of Schmalz’s works over the next eight years.

The original “Homeless Jesus” was rejected by two high-profile cathedrals, St. Michael’s Cathedral in Toronto and St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, and sat in storage for a year.

After the faculty of Regis College at the University of Toronto displayed it in 2013, however, it quickly caught the public interest.

Later that year, Pope Francis blessed the sculpture at St. Peter’s Square in Vatican City as Schmalz looked on.

The media attention created a worldwide market. Schmalz has created sculptures now on display at Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin, which dates to the 11th century; at Singapore’s oldest Roman Catholic church, the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd; and in front of historic St. Ann’s Church in Manchester, England.

He’s preparing more for installation in Budapest, Moscow and other cities.

The “pilgrim” version now in Baltimore will be available for use by any institution within the archdiocese, and “we are open to lending it to any public or religious organization or church that may wish to display it,” said Sean Caine, an archdiocese spokesman.

Caine said he expects the permanent sculpture to be in place at St. Vincent de Paul — where dozens of homeless people typically camp — by the end of the year.

Schmalz said the work is by far the most popular he has created, perhaps because it offers a view of Jesus unlike the “ornamental Jesus” with the “perfect hair, teeth and abs” so often seen in Western art.

Perhaps, he said, a world in need better resonates with a Jesus who embodies the “hard-core truths.”

“‘Love your enemy.’ ‘Take all you have and give it to the poor.’ These are the most difficult things in the world to do, but they’re what we’re asked to do,” he said. “It might be the most challenging invitation of all: to see all human life as sacred.”



VETERANS INN



The Problem- 22 Veterans Commit Suicide Daily

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) plagues the majority of our soldiers and often leads to substance abuse and attempted suicide. A staggering 22 veterans commit suicide daily. This also contributes to the fact that 1 out of every 3 homeless men are Veterans.

Our Solution- Veterans Inn

Just 2 hours south of Jacksonville, lies Lake City. The City of Lake City hosts annual visitors from across the country for events ranging from Civil War re-enactments to Blueberry Festivals. Visitors also routinely flock to the area’s beautiful spring fed rivers and lakes. This city is renowned for its place in American history with over 150 years of incorporation. It is a rapidly growing city and offers many dining and shopping opportunities, along with public transportation to access them.

It is here that we have established our latest project, Veteran’s Inn.

What used to be a low budget motel has been worked on, updated and opened up to accommodate the large population of homeless Veterans in the community. Here we will offer rooms, meals, job placement assistance, and other helpful tools to our residents.

How YOU Can Help- www.homeless.vet

Our goal with this new endeavor is to try and aide these individuals in recovery and rehabilitation. With your support we can help our Veterans and change these statistics. Visit www.homeless.vet to make a donation, volunteer, and see the progress being made in your community.



Inspiring America: Homeless Sisters Run For Gold at Brooklyn Track Club

By Amanda Golden

The Sheppard sisters are running sensations, but it’s what the three young girls are running from that makes them extraordinary.

Tai, 12, Rainn, 11, and Brooke, 9, run hurdles, distance, and high jump, respectively.

When the girls’ half-brother was fatally shot, their family fell on hard times and was evicted from their home. They have lived in a homeless shelter in Brooklyn, New York’s Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood since September of 2015.

“We make the best of it by cleaning it a lot,” Tai said. “We also got rid of the insect problem.”

The three sisters and their mother, Tonia Hardy, live in a two-bedroom unit within the homeless shelter, sharing one bed between the four of them. Hardy, who works full-time, has been raising her girls alone for nearly 10 years.

“It was something that I never thought would happen,” she said of her family’s homelessness.

In spite of where they rest their heads, the sisters are now Junior Olympians. They initially found success with running after a babysitter, on a whim, signed them up for a track meet as a way to keep them occupied after school with an activity that didn’t require fees.

Jean Bell, founder and coach of the Brooklyn-based Jeunesse Track Club, was at their first competition, scouting for new talent. The sisters started prac-

ticing with her team, which consists of more than 30 young women who train and run together.

The staff of the track club predominantly consists of volunteers, and they stress education and mutual respect. The volunteers also try to make sure that each girl graduates from high school.

“We want them to run through the high school years and perhaps get an athletic scholarship so that their dream of going to college can be fulfilled,” Bell said.

The accolades keep rolling in for the Sheppard sisters. They were recently named Sport’s Illustrated Kids’ SportsKids of the Year, having beaten out thousands of others to win the title.

“That’s what this track team has done for them: give them hope,” their mother, Tonia Hardy, said.

The girls credit running with changing their lives, and now that they are some of the brightest young track prospects in the country, their sights are set on gold.

“I really do want to be another greatest Olympian of all time,” Tai said.

When the girls’ half-brother was fatally shot, their family fell on hard times and was evicted from their home.



Orlando News

Florida Hospital closing small, unique hospice

Naseem S. Miller Orlando Sentinel

For the past six years, a quaint, 6-room home called the Robison Residence has been providing hospice care to Central Florida's low-income and homeless patients.

The one-story house is part of Florida Hospital's Hospice of the Comforter in Altamonte Springs. It's also one of the very few free-standing hospice residential facilities in Florida.

But on March 1, after six years, the residence is ceasing operations.

Its closure will affect four residents, including Julie Nelson Day's 84-year-old mother who has severe respiratory problems and is slowly dying.

The family moved her into the hospice in December, partly because it charges low-income elderly like her based on a sliding scale. So on Tuesday, when Day was notified that the residence is closing, she panicked.

"It's just not right," said Day, who lives in Massachusetts. "They have a moral obligation to care for these patients."

Also legally, the hospice is obligated to safely discharge the patients, said Amy O'Rourke, president of Cameron Group Aging Life Care Services.

Hospital officials said social workers will work with families to find them an alternative. They're also giving them the option to transfer their loved one to an area Adventist Care Center nursing home. There, the health system will continue to pay for their room and board and hospice care.

Florida Hospital officials said they decided to



close the home because it has remained a financial burden to Hospice of the Comforter, despite financial donations. Another reason, they said, is Central Florida's growing support for homeless individuals.

"We are confident there are resources in Central Florida and system support for homeless patients needing end-of-life care," they said in a statement.

Day said she didn't have many options for transferring her mother, because other facilities would be too expensive.

She took a bit of comfort in alternatives that hospital officials are providing her, but she said she was still upset.

"This just isn't right," she said.

Tampa News

Ordinance on feeding homeless in Tampa could soon change

Crystal Clark Fox 13 News

A city ordinance that led to seven volunteers getting arrested for feeding the homeless without a permit could soon change.

On Thursday, Tampa City Council members proposed drafting a new ordinance that would be similar to an ordinance in place in St. Petersburg.

Instead of requiring groups to have a city permit and liability insurance to distribute food to the public, the city is considering allowing food handouts, permit-free, as long as the activity draws no more than 50 people.

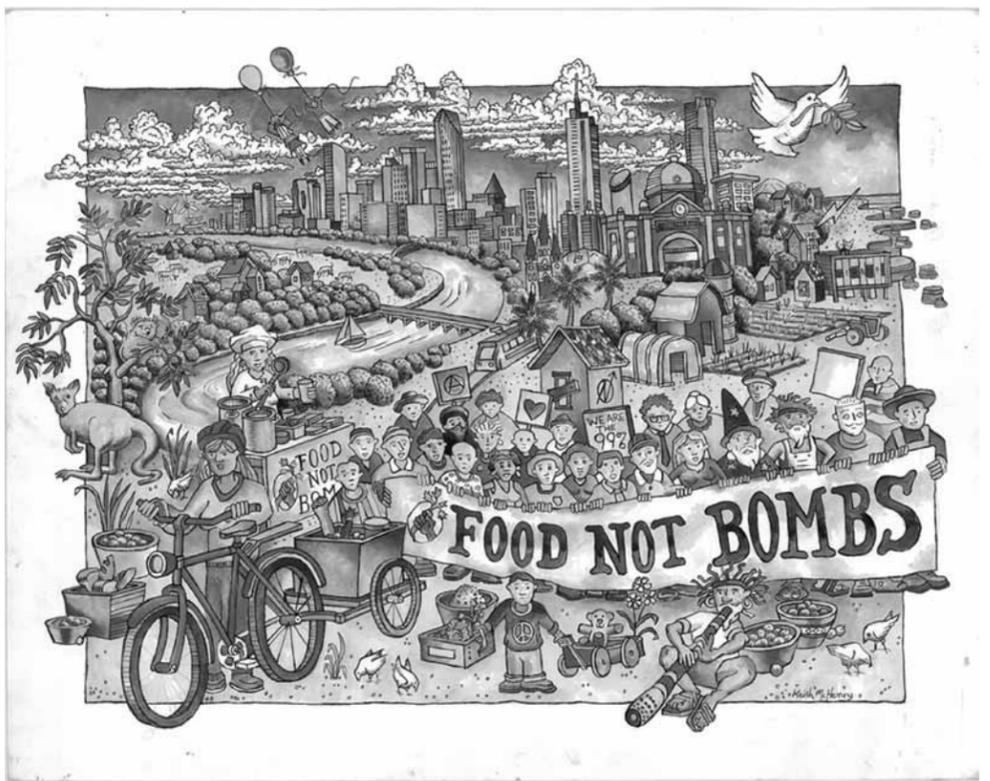
"We have certain safety conditions and rules in order to make sure that your use of the park doesn't disturb other people's use of the park," said Council Chairman Mike Suarez.

Suarez said the current ordinance is not about preventing people from feeding the homeless, but rather, maintaining order in public parks. He said when large, unplanned activities are held, it prevents others from using the public facility.

On January 7, seven volunteers with "Food Not Bombs" were arrested in Lykes Gaslight Park in downtown Tampa for handing out food to the homeless after being warned by the city in advance that they would need a permit.

The city attorney dropped the charges against everyone arrested, including Dezeray Lyn, who said she is pleased that the city is considering the change.

"We won't have police interruption in what we're doing, so in that sense it's easier [to serve the homeless]. It's necessary to do the work, but we're hoping that they make



changes, so that there are less people on the streets," said Lyn.

The proposed ordinance must now be drafted and voted on by city Council. To public readings are required before a new ordinance can become law.

The Homeless Millionaire

Julia Jenae, Jacob Rodriguez

Winning a jury verdict for monetary damages from a business after you've been wronged can be a bittersweet thing. After going through grueling court proceedings - and in some cases significant hospital time - you still have to wait to see what a jury of your peers will decide. Hopefully the award covers the emotional and financial costs incurred.

For one Jacksonville man, who won a verdict from a Southside business to the tune of \$1.2 million, winning the court case has just been bitter.

Spencer Crowder was awarded the money in 2014 and he tells First Coast News he hasn't received a penny of it. He's squatting in an old, dark house once owned by his mother. She now lives in nursing home while her son struggles with no running water, no power and no prospects.

"I'm barely eating, I'm barely getting by right now," he says. "I haven't took a hot bath in God knows when."

He keeps few things in his makeshift home - blankets, clothes and a few documents. One is extremely important. Or, at least, he used to think so.

He says he originally felt relieved when he received the final verdict in his case. No more.

Back in 2012, a night at the club turned into a brutal fight with security guards.

"There was, an altercation going on," Crowder explains. "Some guys that I know - I was pulling them out of the crowd and the next thing you know, I blacked out. [The security guards] overdid it."

He had to be taken from the scene in an ambulance after he says the security guards knocked him unconscious.

"I got a plate in this ankle right here," he says motioning toward his foot. "My shoulder here

was broken."

Crowder spent a week in the hospital and says, after that, making a living as a builder was over for him. The injuries have changed his life, he says. And attorneys agreed at the time. He was told he had a possible negligent security claim against the business for poorly training the guards.

Mobile users | Take a look at the conditions Crowder now lives in

So, he filed a lawsuit.

The owner of the club, Island Oasis Grill N' Chill, LLC never responded and never showed up in court.

"I guess [the owner is] saying, 'bump me,' he's not going to pay me," Crowder says. "How can you feel that way when I went inside your facility, and walked out like this?"

At the trial, a jury handed down a final verdict of \$1,267,447 for Crowder's damages against Island Oasis. The club used to be in a strip mall off Old Baymeadows Road. It never paid Crowder his verdict.

Crowder's personal injury attorney Steven Earle said the business did not carry a liability insurance policy.

"We did everything possible to help Mr. Crowder, but there wasn't any money to recover for him," Earle explained. "The owner [told us] his business dried up after the fight and closed without any funds available."

Local attorney and law professor Natasha Hines didn't

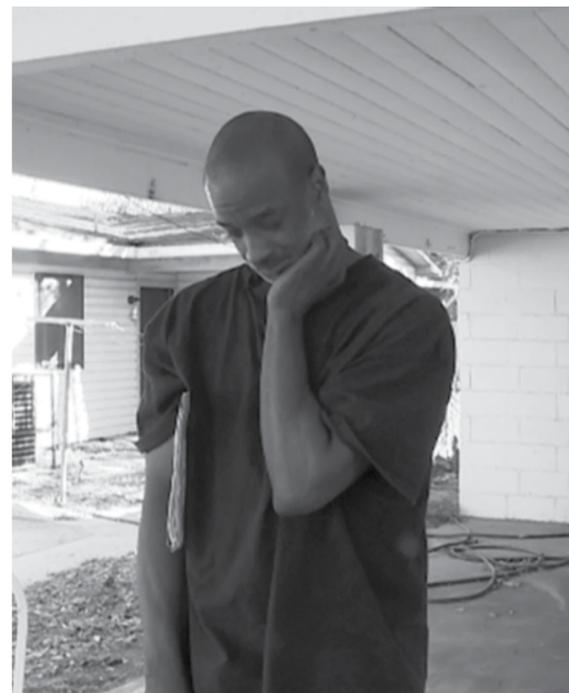
handle Crowder's case, but she says there's a word for companies like Island Oasis, who have no insurance or liquid assets:

Judgment proof.

"You can go through all the channels, all of the litigation, get a judgment and you're in a position where you cannot collect on it," Hines explains. "If there is no insurance it is possible that we would try this case, get a judgment and not be able to collect on it."

Hines said there's currently no easy way for a customer to determine if a business open to the public has liability insurance and carrying insurance isn't required by state law.

Spencer Crowder was awarded the money in 2014 and he tells First Coast News he hasn't received a penny of it.



Crowder does have some criminal history that didn't come up at trial, but Hines says she thinks the jury decision of seven figures says a lot.

"It tells me there's probably no question on the validity of Mr. Crowder's injuries and damages," she says.

But validity alone - actually being a victim of someone else's wrongdoing - won't always mean constant medical bills will be taken care of.

"They keep coming man," Crowder says of his \$100,000 worth of bills. "I gotta go through what I go through, but I know there's a light at the end of the tunnel"

Island Oasis has been closed since 2014. The owner told First Coast News he's aware of the lawsuit but refused to say anything about the case or why he didn't have insurance for his property.

Crowder's Duval County court documents can be read online - showing the path of his case including complaint, summons, the default, verdict and final judgment.

While Crowder continues to struggle the owner of Island Oasis has opened a new business.

Fort Lauderdale News

Homeless man on "Time Out" for a year

Larry Barszewski Sun Sentinel

Ray Cox likes giving Fort Lauderdale commissioners a piece of his mind — over and over again — but for the next year he'll be absent from their meetings.

The homeless man agreed to a plea deal earlier this month to not "attend public hearings, meetings, workshops or conferences where the city of Fort Lauderdale Commission meets" for a year.

Cox has tried the patience of Mayor Jack Seiler and commissioners, frequently requesting to speak on virtually every one of their agenda items, sometimes adding an hour or more to a meeting's length.

He was arrested for trespassing during an October 2015 City Hall commission meeting. Seiler had him removed from the meeting for being disrespectful toward a police officer and said he could not return until he apologized to the officer outside the commission chamber.

Cox, 63, said that's what he did, but the police

wouldn't let him back in. The arrest report says he was "escorted out of City Hall and advised to leave for the day and was trespassed for causing a disturbance."

Cox had his day in court Jan. 18. Jury selection was already completed when the plea deal was finalized. Cox took the deal but fears no one will be there to keep Seiler and the commissioners honest.

"The mayor is mixing politics and arresting people, because I pissed him off at the meeting," Cox said.

The plea agreement came two weeks after Seiler implemented new meeting rules that reduced the ability of the public to speak on individual agenda items.

Seiler said he wasn't aware of the plea agreement until after it was done. He said he won't be missing Cox.

"Ray Cox only came to City Hall in an attempt to disrupt things," Seiler said. "He wasn't there as most citizens are there, in order to make the process better, in order to make a project better."

By the time Cox is allowed back inside, Seiler will be



close to done as mayor. His tenure ends in March 2018.

Cox said he still might show up at some commission meetings, even if he can't go inside.

"I intend to be outside. I will test the limits of the mayor," Cox said.

Miami News

Miami Beach will not support food and beverage tax to fund Homeless Trust

Joey Flechas

Miami Beach commissioners will not be supporting a 1 percent food and beverage tax to fund homeless services after a discussion Wednesday that included urgent pleas from advocates and objections from business groups.

The Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust, facing a budget crunch, wants to use the estimated \$7 million that would be generated by the 1 percent tax to pay for housing more homeless individuals. Chairman Ron Book made his pitch Wednesday at City Hall, asking commissioners to pass a resolution urging the state to expand an existing 1 percent tax to Miami Beach, Bal Harbour and Surfside.

The increase would push restaurant sales-tax bills in Miami Beach from 9 percent to 10 percent. The state levies the tax, so Book was prepared to push a bill in Tallahassee, but he wanted support from the commission. But a majority of commissioners decided they would instead try to find more funding during the summer budget season.

After more than an hour of public comments from many homeless advocates and a few representatives from local businesses, only Commissioner Ricky Arriola favored the expanded tax.

“On a \$100 tab for dinner, we’re talking about \$1,” he said.

The three seaside cities have been exempt from a countywide homeless tax since it was created

in 1993 because each of them already has a restaurant tax that helps pay for municipal services. Book proposed expanding the Trust’s tax revenue base last summer after the federal government withheld about \$6 million in funds.

“We’re not asking the city to carry a higher burden than other cities,” said Olga Golik, director of housing and advocacy for Citrus Health Network. “Just an equal burden.”

Business representatives countered by stating that the additional 1 percent would create the highest food and beverage tax in the state.

Disappointed with the lack of support Wednesday, Book said a budget allocation will help but that it’s subject to change each year. The tax is a more reliable long-term solution because it is more difficult to reverse.

“You want to put other resort tax dollars on the table? Want me to bring you a plan? We’ll do that,” he said. “Do I believe that’s a long-term solution? I don’t.”

Book later told the Miami Herald that he looked forward to working with the commission to increase the city’s annual contribution, which is currently more than \$1 million.

“We are hopeful they will commit meaningful dollars,” he said, adding that homelessness is a countywide issue that includes people from the Beach who receive services.

Businesses spoke out against the tax, citing a difficult

year that included losses in the wake of a Zika outbreak. Jerry Libbin, CEO of the Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce, argued that the tax would hurt sales, with increasing competition from restaurants on the mainland.

“It may sound like it’s not a lot, but it puts us at a competitive disadvantage,” he said.

Advocates pleaded for support while advocating for the Homeless Trust’s philosophy on reducing homelessness, which prioritizes housing as the first step toward taking someone off the street.

Pauline Clarke-Trotman, the housing director for Better Way of Miami, told commissioners she benefited from that approach herself. After being provided housing and working her way to her position, she now works to help others do the same.

“Lives are changed, and people whose lives are changed are able to help many other live,” she said.

This year, the Trust has a \$61 million budget, which is largely funded by \$24.5 million in restaurant taxes and \$28.6 million in federal grants. With cuts in federal funding, Book said the Trust cannot continue to dip into reserves.

We’re not asking the city to carry a higher burden than other cities, just an equal burden.

Tallahassee News

City leaders tour affordable housing developments in Tallahassee

Mariel Carbone

Tallahassee leaders had an opportunity to tour two “out of the box” affordable housing developments in the Capital City, Thursday, February 23rd.

Those include The Dwellings and Westgate Community; both are projects by businessman Rick Kearney, who also funded the Kearney Center, the city’s homeless shelter.

Westgate opened about two years ago and is located off of Blountstown Street between Tharpe and Tennessee streets. It currently has two out of the three styles of living offered, operating.

Right now, residents can live in a boarding house styled space, which sleeps two to three people per room. Those rooms include a bathroom; the house shares an open kitchen and living room. Currently, there are five houses like this operating. All are filled to capacity, serving about 120 people.

Residents pay anywhere from \$5 to \$12.50 a day, depending on their situation. This includes all utilities. They can also pay an additional \$50 a month for a meal plan which includes three meals a day.

Another option, is the bunk house. Which is an open space set up with bunk beds, plus a common kitchen and bathroom space.

Single room occupancy spaces are currently being developed, where each room will be designed for one person. Residents will share a bathroom and living area, with the exception of handicap accessible rooms, which will have their own bathroom.

Kearney described the community as a “sanctuary

site.” Residents are not living there based on leases, but rather behavior. If they are disruptive, they’ll be asked to leave. Several of the people living there are also given jobs inside the community, including maintenance work, to give them purpose.

Kearney’s other project is deemed The Dwellings. That’s located off of Blountstown Highway past Capital Circle NW. It’s still in the building stages, but once complete it will be a community of tiny houses. The cottages will be between 200 and 400 square feet, with the renting rate of about \$700 per month. That includes utilities.

The main goal, again, is affordable housing.

“We have to lower the price point in housing and demonstrate it to the rest of the community and in my opinion the rest of the country,” said Kearney.

There will be no specific requirements for residents; instead, Kearney describing it as “people who need help.” Once completed the community will include a small store, a coffee shop, a water tower, a community center, space for arts and crafts and more.

Kearney describes it as a “living laboratory on sustainable communities.”

City leaders said they are impressed with the progress so far. “They’re really neat, they’re super nice and people that have nice

things try to keep it up,” said Commissioner Scott Maddox.

“I have always felt that we needed something like this that was much more affordable to an array of people in the community,” said Commissioner Nancy Miller.

The Dwellings has been a controversial development in town, with residents in neighboring communities fearing that there would be similar results as to what happened in the areas surrounding the Kearney Center. Those include littering and loitering.

We have to lower the price point in housing and demonstrate it to the rest of the community and in my opinion the rest of the country



“I just want it to be peaceful, I don’t want it to be loud, I don’t want it to be a ruckus, and I don’t want thefts to increase,” said Dominique Tillotson, who lives just beyond the development.

Others, not showing as much concern.

“I think it’s a cool idea as long as it doesn’t bring any more crime to the area,” said Taylor Amiss, who also lives nearby.

Still, Kearney said the project is the way of the future.

“This is going to be a project that is going to lead the way for the country,” said Kearney. “Other communities are starving for this concept and waiting for government or waiting for HUD to come in and figure out how to do this is not going to work. The private sector, entrepreneurial. This pays for itself, there’s no subsidies here, this is a private sector initiative.”

Construction on the community is expected to begin in March.

Location-based app helps users donate essentials to nearby homeless people

Kate Dupere

Marcellus has lived on the streets of Philadelphia for more than four years, and he wants you to know that being homeless isn't easy.

"It's, like, waking up hungry. Going to sleep hungry," he says in a new video, as he fiddles with a small piece of blue plastic in his hands. "But this right here — this got me some food. This got me clothes. This got me a shower and all that."

It's not just any piece of plastic. Marcellus is holding a Bluetooth-connected beacon — a small component of an app called StreetChange that could transform how passersby help curb homelessness in their cities.

StreetChange lets users make small donations toward the wish lists of homeless people living in Philadelphia. While smartphone users can download and use the app anywhere in the U.S., StreetChange makes a local impact through the Bluetooth beacons, which homeless people registered with the app keep with them at all times.

The app alerts users in Philadelphia when a homeless person with a wish list is in their immediate area. This allows users to have a tangible impact, donating things like socks, raincoats and blankets to people they may pass on the street.

StreetChange gives homeless people the ability and agency to create their own wish lists, letting them define what would be helpful for the future.

The app, which is available on iOS and Android, was created by Andrew Siegel and Dan Treglia, both researchers at the University of Pennsylvania. The duo teamed up with the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania to connect Philadelphians experiencing homelessness with caseworkers, and sign them up to receive donations through the app.

"These things right here, they're working."

To enroll in the program, a homeless person needs to have a caseworker and complete a survey, identifying long-term housing goals and possible steps to reach them. Then, they identify 10 to 15 short-term material needs — clothing items, transit vouchers or even a toothbrush — which are then curated into a "registry."

App users can view a picture and bio of StreetChange clients before donating to fund their needs. They can donate an amount as low as \$1 toward an item in a person's wish list. When an item is fully funded, the homeless recipient picks it up from their caseworker



Image by Haley Hamblin/Mashable

— and hopefully gets some needed support services at the same time.

"We put the services and the funded item in the same location to increase engagement," Siegel told The Philadelphia Citizen. "[The person] can refuse services if they want, but the idea is that we're making it more likely the engagement will happen."

The app not only satisfies the short-term needs of individual homeless people, but also allows them to create a more secure footing to achieve long-term goals.

"I can't look for work hungry and dirty," Marcellus says in the video.

"These things right here," he says, holding up the beacon, "they're working. And, hopefully, y'all can put them in more hands."

Nature Tied to Better Mental Health

By Rick Nauert PhD

A new study from the U.K. finds that living in a neighborhood with more birds, shrubs, and trees may help to reduce the risk of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Researchers studied hundreds of people and found that being able to see birds, shrubs, and trees around the home, whether people lived in urban or more leafy suburban neighborhoods.

University of Exeter, the British Trust for Ornithology, and the University of Queensland study involved a survey of mental health in over 270 people from different ages, incomes, and ethnicities.

Researchers also found that those who spent less time out of doors than usual in the previous week were more likely to report they were anxious or depressed.

After conducting extensive surveys of the number of birds in the morning and afternoon of three communities, the study found that lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress were associated with the number of birds people could see in the afternoon.

Researchers studied afternoon bird numbers — which tend to be lower than birds generally seen in the morning — because are more in keeping with the number of birds that people are likely to see in their neighborhood on a daily basis.

The study did not find a relationship between the species of birds and mental health, but rather the number of birds they could see from their windows, in the garden, or in their neighborhood.

Previous studies have found that the ability of most people to identify different species is low, suggesting that for most people it is interacting with birds, not just specific birds, that provides well-being.

University of Exeter research fellow Dr. Daniel Cox, who led the study, said, "This study starts to unpick the role that some key components of nature play for our mental well-being. Birds around the home, and nature in general, show great promise in preventative health care, making cities healthier, happier places to live."

The positive association between birds, shrubs, and trees and better mental health applied, even after controlling for variation in neighborhood deprivation, household income, age, and a wide range of other socio-demographic factors.

The current study expands on an earlier one which found that watching birds makes people feel relaxed and connected to nature.

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