



THE NEWS & OBSERVER

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I advise and enjoin those who direct the paper in the tomorrows never to advocate any cause for personal profit or preferment. I would wish it always to be "the tocsin" and to devote itself to the policies of equality and justice to the underprivileged. If the paper should at any time be the voice of self-interest or become the spokesman of privilege or selfishness it would be untrue to its history.

— from the will of Josephus Daniels, Editor and Publisher 1894-1948

Healing the homeless

One way to combat homelessness is to help people battling addictions fight their way back to health and self-sufficiency. A successful program in Kentucky offers an excellent model for the Triangle.

When asked by panhandlers for spare change, some people decline for fear the money will be used to buy alcohol or drugs. Sadly, that fear may often be justified: Studies say up to 60 percent of people who are homeless in America are there at least partly because of addictions they can't beat, though some try hard to do so.

The connection between homelessness and substance abuse is rarely acknowledged in the Triangle — at least not constructively. Yet other communities' experiences show that paying attention to that link can make a real difference. Raleigh leaders especially — who have been remiss in addressing homelessness — ought to support local efforts to emulate such successes.

In the Triangle, people whose addictions cost them their jobs, families and homes but who want to get their lives back on track pretty much have to fend for themselves. There are a few good programs in the area, including Durham's Triangle Residential Options for Substance Abusers, which since 1994 has helped many recovering addicts start and run their own businesses. But the best most addicts can hope for is a couple of weeks in county-run detox programs that have no long-term effect.

In contrast, a recent N&O story told how Louisville, Ky. — a city about the size of Raleigh — has broken new ground helping homeless people with serious drug and alcohol problems rebuild their lives. A program called The Healing Place, which has received national acclaim, is a critical component of the city's extensive, well-coordinated approach to homelessness. In five years more than 600 people have

completed its intensive recovery and training program, and almost 400 have stayed sober for more than a year afterward.

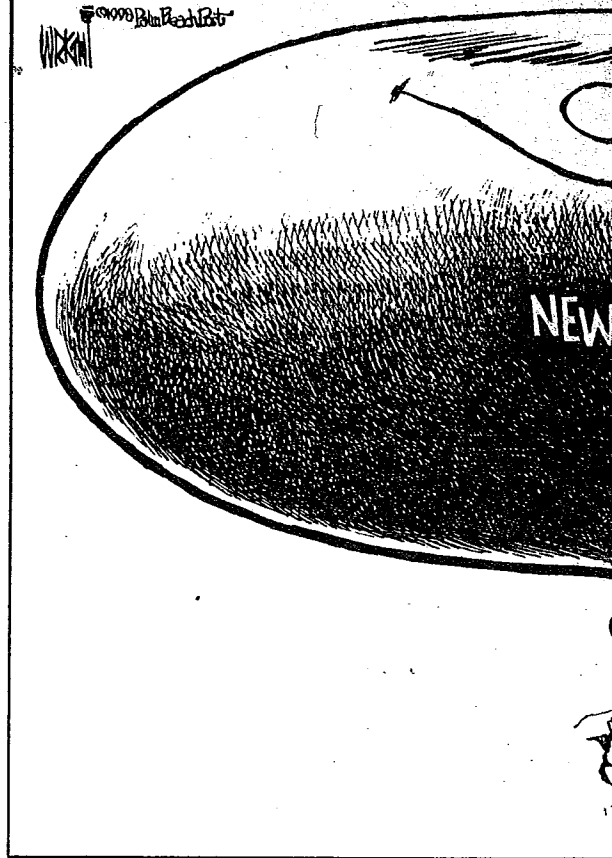
Key elements of The Healing Place's unique program include a 12-step recovery program, strict behavioral expectations with consequences for violators, and job training. But the main reason it works so well is that recovering addicts' journeys back to health and self-sufficiency are guided by folks who know the painful path they must travel all too well, because they've been down it themselves. Former addicts serve as counselors and role models, and their examples mean more than a thousand lectures ever could.

Some community leaders rightly think that approach could work well in Raleigh, too. Success replicating it here will likely depend on building public support and bringing political pressure to bear, given city officials' track record on homelessness.

After years of half-hearted debate, for example, they still have no plans to build a permanent shelter, and now are considering making permanent a temporary site that may be inadequate. They have not, in other words, seemed interested in long-term solutions.

Substance abuse is one of many factors contributing to homelessness. Any serious effort to stem it must also address mental illness, lack of affordable housing, and unemployment due to lack of skills or transportation. But The Healing Place model effectively tackles one very important aspect of this troubling problem, and it's worth trying here.

Editorial



THE PE

That's some 'gravy train'

I would like to respond to the Nov. 21 People's Forum letter-writer who thinks tobacco farmers "have been on a gravy train all their lives." He thinks farmers work three months out of the year and spend the rest of the year hunting coons and shooting the bull at the country store.

I want to know what planet he lives on! It takes a lot longer than three months to get in a tobacco crop, not to mention the worry about drought, blue mold, hurricanes . . . the list goes on, too many to mention. Most of the farmers who raise tobacco do so because that is what they know how to do, after all, it is a legal crop. While the workload has eased for the farmers since they don't have to sit and "grade" tobacco like they used to, now they have to worry about how to pay for the expensive equipment it takes to ease that load and where to find help getting the tobacco out of the field.

Since the writer is accusing farmers of killing people, why not blame John Deere or any of the companies that make the tractors used to tend the tobacco? Or how about the companies that make the trucks that haul the tobacco? The assumption that makes the

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