



Fred Barber announces the location of The Healing Place on the Dorothea Dix Hospital campus in Raleigh. The Healing Place will take in homeless men even if they are drunk or high. The program will help addicts find a job and a home.

STAFF PHOTO BY KEITH GREENE

# Homeless men find place to heal

BY MATTHEW TEAGUE  
STAFF WRITER

**RALEIGH** — Finally, The Healing Place is on its way to becoming ... a place.

Until recently, the innovative homeless shelter was itself homeless — its backers raised money, studied similar institutions and even commissioned an artist to sketch it out, but couldn't find a place to put the buildings.

At a news conference Tuesday, The Healing Place's organizers announced that they will build the shelter on land in the Dorothea Dix Hospital complex, just southwest of downtown Raleigh. The shelter will offer alcohol and drug treatment and beds for 165 homeless men.

Here's the innovative part, according to organizers: Unlike existing shelters, The Healing Place will take in drifters who are drunk or high. Theoretically, that will cut down on trips to hospitals and jails — which officials hope will save taxpayers money.

So far, organizers say, they have raised \$3.5 million to build the privately funded shelter, which will cost about \$4.5 million.

City Council member Benson Kirkman represents the area where the homeless shelter will be built. He said Tuesday that voters in his district shouldn't be worried about a sudden stream of homeless wanderers; he studied a similar shelter in Louisville, Ky., and was impressed.

"I went as a skeptic," Kirkman said. "I came back not just as a believer, but as an advocate."

He said there will be "virtually no walk-in clients" at the shelter, because they will be bused in.

"We're going to do this right," he said.

David Bruton, state secretary of health and human services, is also a booster of the project. He said, "I'd say a man would be lucky to be homeless and a drug abuser after The Healing Place opens up."

The news conference was held on the fourth floor of the Briggs Hardware build-

ing on the Fayetteville Street Mall. As television crews folded their tripods afterward, a sunburned man who gave the name John Warner wandered across the mall, asking for spare change. Asked for his opinion of The Healing Place — which will boast basketball courts and a dining hall — Warner lowered his brows and said, "What do you think? Sounds nice. Sounds like home to me."

Nice, yes. Home, no.

Officials say the average stay at The Healing Place will be three to six months, and "clients" will have to work on the grounds or take classes during their stay. When they get a job and a home, they leave.

There are about 1,900 homeless people in Wake County, according to official estimates, and about 80 percent of them struggle with a drug or alcohol addiction.

Matthew Teague can be reached at 829-4848 or mteague@nando.com