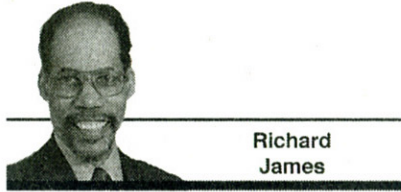


# The Eleventh Man has no safe place to sleep

The Transient's Room at the American Rescue Workers' headquarters in Williamsport is surprisingly cramped. I was expecting a dormitory space with dozens of cots, but instead there were only five double bunk beds to accommodate a maximum of 10 men. There is only one bathroom with one shower stall.

Each morning the men are awakened at 6 am with a flick of the light switch. A chorus of grunts, groans and smoker's coughs greet the flash of fluorescence. A man (18 years of age) must abide by the Center's strict rules to gain a bed. (No smoking in the building, no alcohol or drugs, no profanity, no fighting and no slander! No food allowed in Transients Room.) Each man must to make his bed and must shower daily.

There is nothing luxurious about the place. There are no inspiring images on the pale gray walls, just posted reminders of the rules. There are no lounge chairs or cable TV in the Transient's Room. Daylight barely filters through the



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grated windows. The clock on the wall affirms the slow passage of time. An oscillating fan blows cool air. It eases the sense of claustrophobia but the breeze carries the funk of sweaty socks and old work boots.

The men deserve their privacy; they work hard at maintaining their anonymity and dignity. However, they are not what I expected. Some are young and seemingly able-bodied. (With a little luck some of these men, who seek permanent housing, may graduate into "the program" that has 38 additional beds. A man can earn his keep by working in the clothing sorting room, the loading dock, on the collection trucks, etc.)

The men do not discuss the decisions that lead them to this place. Each man is his own island. The

Men's Center Director, Kevin Carroll grants each man a 7-night stay with a possibility of a time extension.

The Transient's Room is closed from 7:30 am to 4 pm everyday. Most of the men go to their jobs or look for work. A few walk the streets trying to be invisible. All of the residents of the Transients Room must return at 10 pm for mandatory bed-check or else they may lose their bed to another needy man that requests shelter for the night. If the beds are full, the eleventh man is out of luck.

American Rescue Workers, a pseudo-military, Christian-based philanthropic organization, offers beds to homeless men and it provides monetary assistance to families in the Williamsport area. It also operates several thrift stores selling bric-a-brac items at reasonable prices and even has an Internet store on Ebay.

"We accept homeless men within a 60 mile radius of Williamsport." Director Carroll said. "We get men as far away as Tioga, Bradford and Schuylkill Counties."

While homeless men are a clear example of the poverty among us, other indications are more subtle. It is believed that those living at or near the poverty line account for 30% of Americans. Nicholas Eberstadt, of the American Enterprise Institute, urged recently for new definition of the poverty rate in the Washington Post. He said, "The poverty rate is utterly incapable of tracking material deprivation in the United States with any accuracy." The whole system needs an overhaul; no one knows for sure how many poor people there are in America.

Many people work hard everyday but they may never get out of poverty. Visit the website, [www.povertyinamerica.psu.edu](http://www.povertyinamerica.psu.edu) and click on the handy living wage calculator. If you're a single adult with a child you must earn at least \$12.88 per hour in Williamsport, Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, otherwise you're not really "making it". The calculator was developed by Amy K. Glasmeier and was last updated in July 2007.

The scope of homelessness and

poverty has changed; it is more inclusive.

What does it all mean? Organizations like American Rescue Workers may need a lot more beds... soon. If the economy continues to worsen, there could be more homeless in our streets. Yet, in tough times, it is hard for charitable agencies to find necessary funding. Budgets are being scaled back. There is less of the money to go around.

American Rescue Workers, in collaboration with Pennsylvania College of Technology's Le Jeune Chef Restaurant, is organizing its first annual Tea Luncheon & Silent Auction to raise funds for the Center's kitchen. The event will be held at Le Jeune Chef, 1 College Ave., Williamsport on October 20, 2008 at 11:30am to 1:30pm. For tickets (\$25 per person) contact Kevin Carroll at 570-323-8401 ext. 18.

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