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ANDERSON COOPER 360 DEGREES

Six People Killed in Illinois College Shooting; Romney Backs McCain; New Orleans' Homeless

Aired February 14, 2008 - 22:00 ET

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ANDERSON COOPER, CNN ANCHOR: We're in Saint Bernard Parish, just outside New Orleans. And we are going to have a lot more of what's happening here coming up later in the program.

But we begin tonight with the breaking news at a place where violent crime ought to be rare or nonexistent -- that's what every parent hopes, at least -- a college campus. Tonight, it is a crime scene.

Earlier, tragically, it was a killing ground. The location, Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, about a



COOPER: Taking a look at New Orleans historic French Quarter, very much alive. The shops and bars are open. So are the restaurants. The food is better than ever. The French Quarter is actually cleaner than ever.

When we were here for the second anniversary of Katrina, we told you that the rebirth and renewal of New Orleans was well under way. And we see that even more tonight. And a lot of it is because of people like this, like the people behind me here.

We're coming to you from Camp Hope run by Habitat for Humanity. These are hundreds of volunteers. Oh, yes, there's a little bit of excitement, right?

(CHEERING AND APPLAUSE)

(LAUGHTER)

COOPER: Hundreds of volunteers from AmeriCorps, Habitat for Humanity, the NCCC.

They are helping to reenergize, rebuild this community. We have done dozens of hours of broadcasts from New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast and from here in Saint Bernard Parish since the initial disaster.

And, today, we heard actually more optimism, more confidence, more -- more hope, frankly, than ever before. So, here's the good news. The population of New Orleans is at 70 percent of what it was before the hurricane. Employment is up nearly 80 percent of pre- Katrina level.

More encouraging news, 21 public schools that were closed since the storm have reopened since last fall. Tourism is back. This weekend, another big boost in the Big Easy: The NBA All-Star Game is here. It's the first time New Orleans has hosted the event at the New Orleans Arena.

A lot of difficulties, though, still remain. Crime is still a huge problem, no doubt about it. There's also a great need to -- to fix the infrastructure, rebuild homes and neighborhoods. A lot of people are still in need.

Tonight, we want to tell you about the growing number of Americans now living on New Orleans' streets.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

COOPER (voice-over): Herman Moore (ph) watches nightfall over New Orleans. He gets uncomfortable when the sun goes down.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: You don't know who can come up to while you're sleeping and bust you in your head, take what you have. It's -- it's -- it's really not a comfortable sleep. It's very uneasy.

COOPER: Herman is one of an estimated 12,000 homeless people in New Orleans. That's double the number of homeless that lived here before Hurricane Katrina.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I never imagined it would happen, because I have been through, like I say, two other storms, Camille and Betsy. I didn't think this Katrina was going to do what it did. Another lesson in life, never underestimate nothing.

COOPER: A New Orleans native, Herman once lived in a rented house in the Seventh Ward. He held a steady job as a janitor. When Katrina hit, his house was swamped, and he was one of the thousands sent to the Superdome.

The memory of the chaos is still raw.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: But the way that crowd was, because those people -- I mean, those people was frantic

They were scared. You just had to be there.

Anyway, they sent me to San Antonio.

COOPER (on camera): Herman didn't stay in San Antonio, Texas, very long. His home was destroyed but New Orleans was still his home. He came back, lived in a trailer park for a while. But the park got closed down.

The last couple of weeks he's been living here at a makeshift camp under a highway overpass. About 200 other people live here, as well. Groups who work with the homeless that say many of these people are here, one way or another, because of Hurricane Katrina.

MARTHA KEGEL, UNITY PROJECT: It's all Katrina-fueled in the sense that we lost 52,000 units of rental housing and very little has been replaced. And the rent has skyrocketed in New Orleans since Katrina. The fair market rents have gone up 50 percent. In many cases rents have doubled.

This used to be an easy place, relatively speaking, for poor people to live. Hence, the name the Big Easy. People cannot get by anymore.

COOPER (voice-over): Can't get by because there are just over half as many beds available to the homeless as there were before Katrina.

Martha Kegel's testified on Capitol Hill twice, asking for an increase of rent subsidies for the homeless, but so far she's heard nothing but empty promises.

KEGEL: The problem is that we just get told wait until the next appropriations bill. And at this point, it's become a dire emergency.

COOPER: The emergency may be ending for Herman. The morning after we met him, he was finally able to leave the camp.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I'm looking forward to this day.

COOPER: He registered with FEMA after the storm. And though it took two years of waiting and persistent calls, this morning he was given his own apartment. FEMA will pay his rent through 2009.

Herman says it will give him a real chance to start over. He hopes to go to nursing school and pick up where he left off more than two years ago.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Are you ready?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I was ready for you.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

COOPER: A new beginning for Herman, we hope. We should point out we called House speaker Nancy Pelosi's office for comment and for information about what the holdup is with these vouchers. We so far have not gotten any information back.