

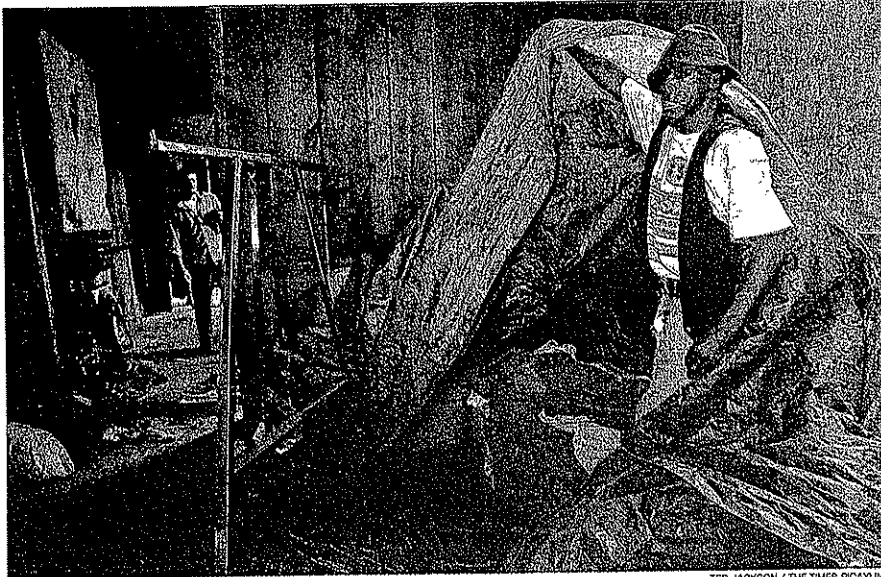
NEW ORLEANS

A/B

 SECTION
B
 Thursday,
 April 24, 2008

AND THE METRO AREA

TRUMPETING HOPE



TED JACKSON / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

Harry Anderson on Wednesday displays a tent he was using for shelter in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when rain was pouring through the damaged roof at the home on Annette Street in New Orleans. Anderson, 55, who was severely burned in an accident at the home and found himself living under the North Claiborne Avenue overpass, was eventually rescued by the homeless-advocacy group UNITY of Greater New Orleans.

Group works to save squatters

Trumpeter joins housing activists

By Katy Reckdahl
 Staff writer

On Wednesday trumpeter Irvin Mayfield became the official champion of the homeless-advocacy group UNITY of Greater New Orleans, which announced the jazz musician's new role in front of an abandoned 7th Ward house once occupied by a mentally ill man.

Such boarded-up houses "represent the reason why New Orleans is currently engulfed in a crisis of homelessness," UNITY Director Mar-



tha Kegel said in introducing one of the home's former residents, Harry Anderson, 65. Mayfield then asked New Orleanians to help UNITY find squatters and get them into apartments through an initiative UNITY calls "No One Suffers Alone."

UNITY asks residents who think someone is living in a house without utilities to call the agency at (504) 821-4496. Caseworkers will visit those people and try to house them in safer conditions.

Anderson lives in a government-subsidized apartment Uptown. But a few months ago, he lived under the North Claiborne Avenue overpass,

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UNITY helped him find shelter.

Earlier this year, donations from citizens, along with trailers full of furniture from the Doubletree and Westin hotels, helped

to furnish apartments for homeless people who were leaving an earlier encampment at Duncan Plaza. UNITY is once again soliciting household goods to furnish apartments for those leaving the Claiborne colony, Mayfield said.

When Mayfield began talking to UNITY, he learned what research now shows: that most people's homelessness can end with minimal assistance. It gave him hope.

Now Mayfield wants to spread that hope to others, including city decision-makers, many of whom are already in

N.O. has epidemic of house squatters

ABANDONED, from B-1

his entire scalp covered with an infection from severe burns that hadn't healed, said UNITY social worker Mike Miller, who got him to a hospital.

Anderson's problems are shared by many under the Claiborne bridge: inadequate housing, mental and physical illness, and substance abuse. In the past few months, UNITY social workers have removed 62 residents, who are now in their own places or staying in low-cost hotel rooms en route to their own apartments. But still, about 100 people remain there

in what has become a putrid, chaotic mess.

"Claiborne is the eyesore. It reminds us how hopeless homelessness can seem," Mayfield said. But the situation can be addressed, he said. In the next few months, UNITY and its partner, the New Orleans Mission, hope to house almost everyone from the tent city, financed by a few sources including Road Home money earmarked for homelessness.

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Mayfield's Rolodex.

New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Warren Riley came to show his support at Wednesday's news conference. At a dinner with President Bush on Monday night, Mayfield said, he emphasized the city's need for 3,000 permanent supportive-housing vouchers.

In recent weeks Mayfield also has spoken about the issue with Gov. Bobby Jindal and Mayor Ray Nagin. "The mayor, the governor and the president are on the same page," he said. "There is a plan to end homelessness in New Orleans."