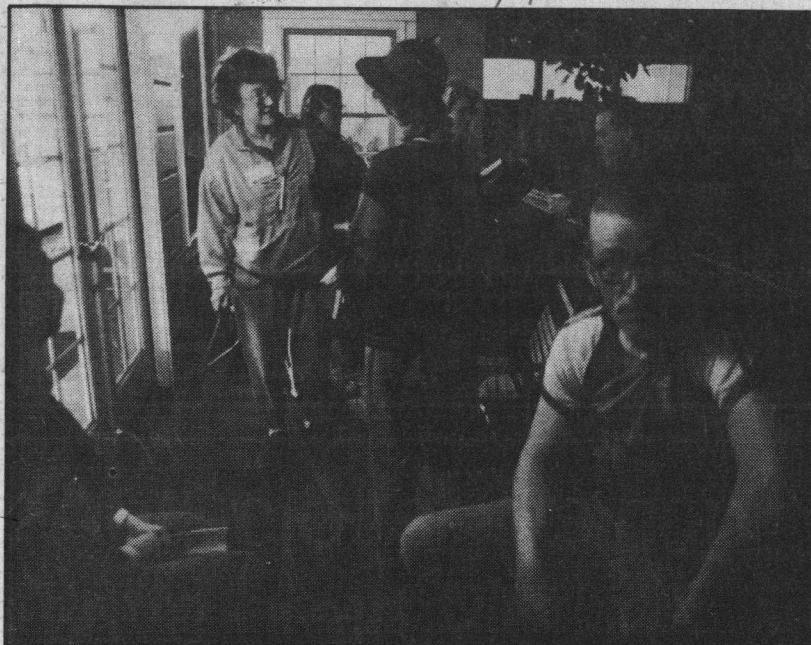


Head count of the homeless

Census-1990



Photos by Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Census-taker is met at the door of the River Street shelter.

Local count met with skepticism

By STEVE PEREZ
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — The first-ever federal attempt to count the local homeless population began Tuesday night — and the consensus among local activists was that while the process was somewhat flawed, it was better than no count at all.

Phase one of the program — an effort to count those in shelters — ran from 6 p.m. to midnight. Badge-wearing census-takers gathered at Denny's Restaurant on Ocean Street to get their assignments for the night.

As night fell, field operation supervisor Tom Dahl worked out of a Ford camper to dispatch five team leaders and their crews of five to eight workers to cover the area from northern Santa Cruz County to Airport Boulevard in Watsonville.

Before the effort began, city officials and homeless experts were skeptical that the count would be accurate. The experiences of those who took part and observed Tuesday night appeared to support that

judgment.

"This is a farce," said Kurt Richardson of Soquel, a freelance proof-reader and editor moonlighting as a census-taker for the evening. "I've walked back and forth from the restaurant to the parking lot about 18 times so far. I could have counted half of the people I'm supposed to count by now, but I haven't been told (who and where to count) yet."

"I think they could make better use of people. But hey, it's government money, right?"

Dahl had to drive his crew's time-cards and other paperwork to Salinas and then return to Santa Cruz by 10 p.m. to pick up their completed census forms. He said he was being told of new places to count as late as 4 p.m. Tuesday.

"This is a major undertaking," he said. "You can never really be organized enough for this."

"I'm impressed by what I've seen so far," said another census taker, Victoria Beckner, 23, a UC Santa Cruz history and philosophy senior. "In 1980 the homeless

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Homeless man, right, at the River Street shelter looks over census form as census-takers, left, talk with shelter director Nancy Houk.

Homeless in the census' sights

The Associated Press

A legion of clipboard-toting counters sought out shelters, subways and steam grates Tuesday in the broadest attempt ever to find out the extent of homelessness since it became a national disgrace in the 1980s.

The tally went on into the night despite a spring storm that interrupted the count in Vermont by dumping up to 22 inches of snow and the refusal of some shelters to allow census-takers inside.

Some homeless didn't mind the government intrusion.

"It shows that they're starting to recognize us as humans and not the scum of the earth," said Chester Broadwell, 21, who answered questions at the Waystation Shelter in Burlington, Vt.

No one expects the \$2.7 million, one-night U.S. Census Bureau effort to yield a precise tally of Americans with no fixed address. Critics fear an undercount will allow the government to justify cuts in services.

"We'll get the vast majority," said Barbara Bryant, director of the Census Bureau, which expected to hit 22,000 shelters and street sites nationwide.

"There are no believable numbers of homeless in America," she said at a news conference in New York. "This is going to get an order of the magnitude of the problem."

In San Francisco, hundreds of census workers visited shelters and cheap hotels.

"I hope they get all the folks

living in those cars along the waterfront and in the Financial District and a bunch of other places you'd never expect to find us," a 32-year-old homeless man who identified himself only as Johnson said at the Canon Kip Center in San Francisco.

"We've been living a long time in the cracks, and it ain't going to be easy to find a lot of us," he said as the 14-hour survey began.

Some say the figure is as low as

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Local/ Few homeless hired to help

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weren't even counted. It seems fairly effective. I realize we're not going to get a perfect count."

At the River Street shelter, a homeless 44-year-old man who preferred not to be named watched in frustration as one group of census takers handed out questionnaires to some 30 people.

He said he was one of three or four River Street shelter occupants who had been promised jobs Tuesday night, but were never notified of the training sessions held last weekend.

"They promised the homeless would get preference for these jobs," he said. "They told me I was hired but they never got back to me. I must have made about 18 calls down to Salinas (where the local census effort is based) and spent a lot of money on phone calls.

"Here we were, people who they could trust, willing to go out and work and who could have used the money," he said. "I feel cheated in both ways. I think I'd be a lot more sensitive to their needs and they'd know my face, so people who otherwise might not trust total strangers would talk to me."

Franca Gargiulo, the census district manager in charge of the count in Santa Cruz, San Benito and Monterey counties, said that of the 200 people hired, only 12 to 15 were actually homeless.

"We have made every attempt to hire members of the homeless community," she said. "We hired close to 50 members, but we only had half that many show up for training. If some folks didn't get called, I apologize."

At least two shelter-program directors said they were not contacted before the Tuesday night count.

Nancy Houk, director of the River Street shelter, said she had no idea what time the workers were coming by. As a result, she said, some shelter residents may not have been counted when the crew showed up at about 6:45 p.m.

"We usually have a big crowd for the evening meal at 6 p.m., then they're allowed to leave for a few hours if they want," she said. "It's possible some of them may have been missed."

Andrew Morin, director of the Interfaith Satellite Shelter Project, said he had not been contacted either, and was concerned that the more-than-100 participants in his program would be missed.

"It's not very well organized," he said. "I think if they come up with a number, it's going to be one they pulled out of their hat."

Gargiulo insisted that according to her records, both directors had been contacted and both programs would be included in the count.

She said the program had identified 162 separate shelter locations in the tri-county area.

"This is the very first time the country has ever done this," Gargiulo said. "This is the prototype model. You can always improve a prototype. I think for the first time it's been an excellent attempt, and a whole lot better than 1980 when there was no count at all."

Final results should be tallied by the end of the week, Gargiulo said. However, she said, U.S. Census officials have not said if information can be released locally before it is released nationally.

Her concern was the so-called "street count" effort. From midnight to 8 a.m., Wednesday, a second shift of workers was scheduled to begin the even more difficult task of counting those on the streets and illegal campgrounds.

"We've had some locations where the police and sheriff's deputies advised us it probably wasn't safe to visit at four o'clock in the morning," Daul said.