

The Sun 11/5/87

# River St. Shelter Opens

Homeless to 1989



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Prospective occupants trickled in to inaugurate the first night of shelter operation.

**A** chapter in the quest for public placement of the homeless closed this Sunday with the inauguration of a shelter that was history before it ever existed. The relatively quiet awakening of the River Street Shelter came on the heels of two years of highly publicized planning and conceptualization, months of tumultuous purchasing negotiations and an array of possible roadblocks ranging from funding shortages to opposition amongst area residents.

In a flurry of enthusiasm and administrative loose ends, Democratic Management Services representative and shelter director Fred Gray opened the facility Sunday at 5:30pm and was serving dinner to a full house by 7pm.

Even with only half of the bed spaces ready and no kitchen yet installed, the demand for the year-round house was clearly present. Many area shelters operate on a part-time, five-month basis, and with winter not yet official, shelter is at a threshold of need.

When the River Street Shelter begins capacity-load operations it will be the largest local facility, with 30 to 35 bed spaces by this winter. By then, the county's combination of church- and government-run shelters should account for all of the area's rainy-season homeless.

"But homelessness is unrelated to the cold," elaborated Gray. "There's an invisibility factor that sets in when Thanksgiving and Christmas are over. Summer's supposed to mean nice

weather and the beach... but homelessness is a year-round issue."

Gray seemed to gauge enthusiasm for the shelter by nonchalantly leafing through a stack of slips representing donations of food, clothing and furniture, noting that about 20 mostly anonymous gifts have poured in since the morning paper published a request for goods.

Free, pre-cooked meals from local restaurants have been coming in at a rate almost comparable to the gifts; the shelter staff have few qualms about offering free breakfasts and dinners despite the fact that the kitchen won't be finished for at least a month.

"Most shelters are run as very needed warehouses, as modern port houses," said Gray, who describes the meal plan as an integral factor making the shelter a setting for "initiative and motivation." "This is not a hole for people to fall into."

The shelter is the combined effort of local government and the activists and philanthropists who constitute the Shelter Project. Purchased from UCSC after months of negotiations with the city of Santa Cruz, the facility will survive off of relatively minimal fundraising on the part of the Shelter Project and periodic operative grants provided by the county.

—Elizabeth Kadetsky