

HOMELESS CENSUS 2005

Tracking the homeless

Homeless 2000

32305

Numbers crucial to securing federal funding for county

By BRIAN SEALS

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

As Ron Clark steered the car with one eye peeled, Bill Johnson held a clipboard and wrote a mark for each homeless person the pair found.

"There's one in there, I know it," Johnson said as the car slowly passed a camper pickup truck in the Harvey West area.

'This is a real problem all the cities need to address.'

CLIFF BARRETT,
SCOTTS VALLEY
CITY COUNCIL

That scene was played out repeatedly across Santa Cruz County on Tuesday as 80 people spanned the area to count the homeless population.

Bleary-eyed teams gathered at 5 a.m. at three locations — the River Street shelter in Santa Cruz, at Mountain Community Resources in Felton and at the Applied Survey Research office in Watsonville — before traveling

the riverbanks, roads, forests and other hideaways. In Santa Cruz, the most were found in the downtown, Main Beach and San Lorenzo River areas.

The search in Watsonville stretched from Corralitos to downtown and along the levee of the Pajaro River, where close to 60 homeless were counted.

The city of Scotts Valley took a special interest in the count, with City Councilman Cliff Barrett and a handful of city employees participating.

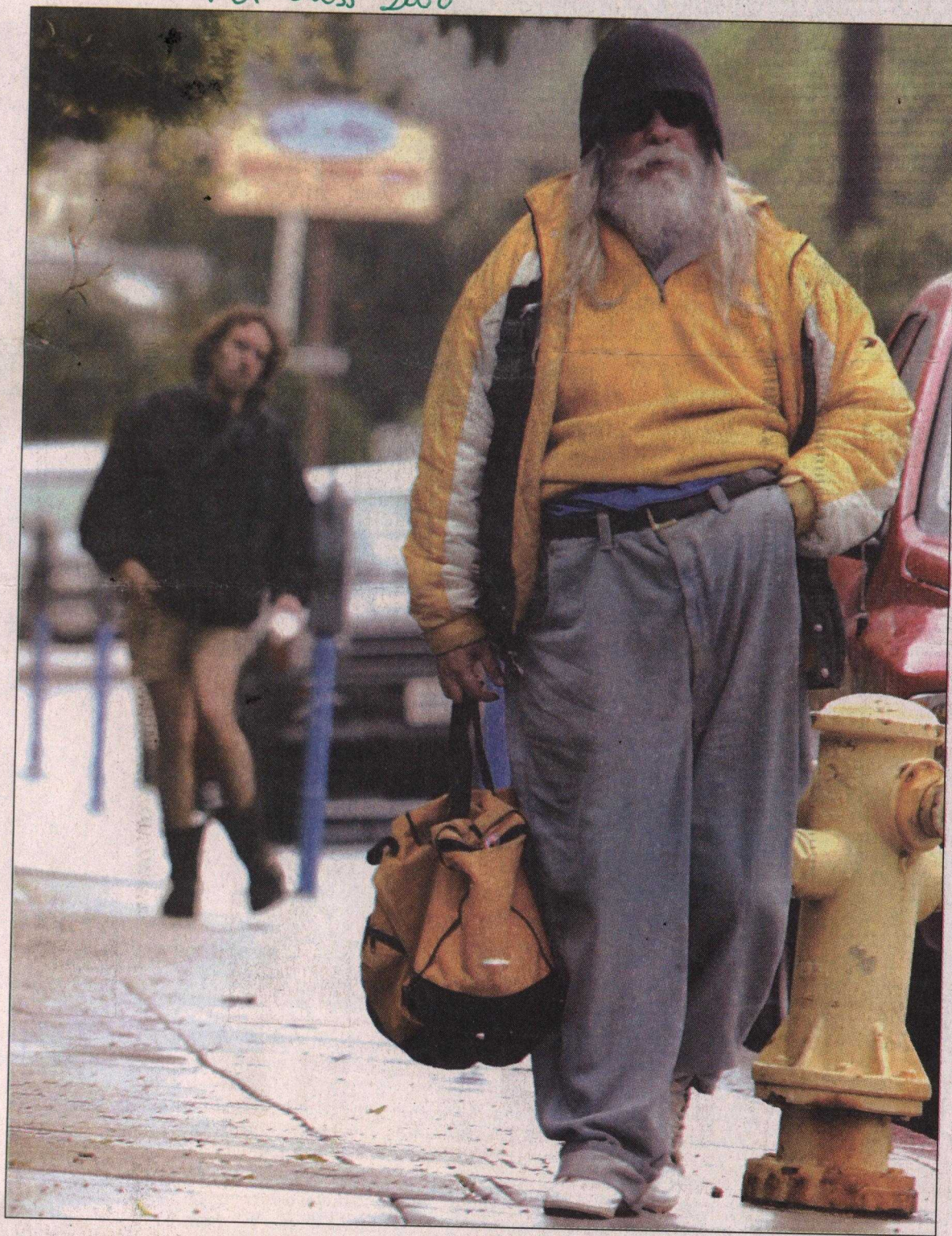
"This is a real problem all the cities need to address," Barrett said.

The count was the first in the county in five years and a new requirement for federal dollars that go to homeless assistance programs from the department of Housing and Urban Development. Various county agencies received about \$1.18 million in HUD money for such services this year.

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The homeless census Tuesday morning is the county's first attempt since 2000 to try to assess the situation.

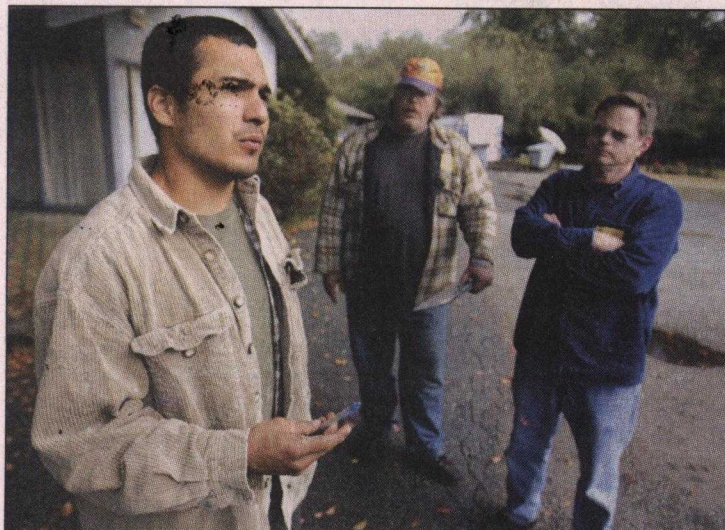
Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel



'The reason HUD is pushing this is because communities need to understand the nature of their local problem.'

Homeless

KEN COLE, HOMELESS SERVICES CENTER



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Zeke Vega, who has survived as a homeless man in various areas of the county, speaks to Bill Johnson and Ron Clark during the census count of the homeless Tuesday morning.

Homeless

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Volunteers, most of whom worked with homeless-related agencies, were paired with homeless workers who know the best places to find their counterparts and were paid \$10 per hour for their work.

Zeke Vega said he likes to find generally residential areas with plenty of bushes.

"Residential is the safest place," said Vega, homeless off and on since 1997.

Some of his counterparts favor more rural areas.

"For hard-core people, the rural areas are a turn-on," he said.

That's the kind of knowledge the census wants to tap into. Applied Survey Research was hired by the county to conduct the count, with the county and its four cities sharing the bill. A follow-up survey of about 400 homeless is planned to begin later this week.

The Watsonville-based company conducted the last county survey and has also performed them in other areas, including Monterey, San Bernardino County and, earlier this year, in Los Angeles.

Tuesday's count came after a night of heavy rain and before the day's downpour, but organizers aren't sure how the weather conditions will affect the count. While some of the homeless were found along riverbanks and in camps in

the woods, many of the finds were in cars and vans.

"It was almost all cars," Rocky Allemandi, of the Santa Cruz County Counseling Center, said of the people he and a teammate counted in the Capitola area.

Peter Connery of Applied Survey Research said the precipitation may have a double-edged impact.

On one hand, it could drive people into shelters where the counting is easier. Conversely, it can make the counting more difficult.

"Sometimes it drives people underground," Connery said.

Ken Cole of the Homeless Services Center said he suspects the rain drives people from campsites to look for a dry space.

"Any time you have rain, it has a dampening effect on how people move," he said.

Clark, who works at the River Street shelter, and Johnson found only a handful of the homeless at potential spots near UC Santa Cruz, they said.

Meanwhile, Michelle Fodge and a teammate named Mike found about 30 people.

"We had a high intensity because we were at the (Santa Cruz) wharf," Fodge said. "Mike has the eyes. He was the quality control."

The census and the survey will enable agencies in the county to compete for federal dollars and tailor services. The information will be used by the Homeless Action Partnership, a coalition of service



A woman arrives at the Homeless Resource Center on Tuesday morning after a night in a local shelter. The first homeless census since 2000 tracked homeless people throughout the county.



Census-takers Bill Johnson, left, and Ron Clark check out a camper in the Harvey West area on Tuesday.

providers, government officials, police and churches that focuses on the various factors that contribute to homelessness.

"The reason HUD is pushing this

is because communities need to understand the nature of their local problem," Cole said.

Applied Survey Research will take the numbers and calculate a

statistical projection to estimate the homeless population in the county.

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