



THE MAD HOUSERS

449 Moreland Ave., Suite 002, Atlanta, GA 30307 · (404) 806-6233 · www.madhousers.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

**Jan. 3, Saturday, 2pm-8pm
Presentation**
Sevananda (467 Moreland)

**Jan. 6+7, Wednesday 7:00 pm
Low Rider Panel Builds**
Warehouse (538 Permalume Pl.)

**Jan. 11, Sunday 10:00 am
Low Rider Build**
Warehouse (538 Permalume Pl.)

**Jan. 15, Thursday 7:00 pm
Fundraiser/PR Meeting**
Jake's (676 Highland Ave.)

**Jan. 17, Saturday, 2pm-8pm
Presentation**
Sevananda (467 Moreland)

**Jan. 20+21, Wednesday 7:00 pm
Low Rider Panel Builds**
Warehouse (538 Permalume Pl.)

**Jan. 25, Sunday 10:00 am
Low Rider Build**
Warehouse (538 Permalume Pl.)

**Jan. 28, Wednesday 7:00pm
General Meeting**
Jake's (676 Highland Ave.)

Check www.madhousers.org for the latest news and upcoming events!

BACKYARD BBQ BUILD + BENEFIT

We'd like to thank the following companies for their donations to our benefit:

Colonial Bread

Graphcom, Inc

Heller Highwater, Inc

**Hopewell Missionary
Baptist Church**

Maddy's BBQ

Tower Package Store

(PHOTOS ON PAGE 6)



THANKSGIVING GIFT

Winter is typically our busiest season. The cold weather makes building shelters our top priority, while at the same time we start getting deluged with phone calls from clients, donors, and volunteers. Early this November, however, one phone call stood out from the rest.

Greg Davis was friends with a homeless man named Paul whom he'd known for several years. Paul had had a stroke about a year earlier, and Greg, along with his friend David Powell, didn't want to see him spending another winter without shelter.

Greg and David not only donated the materials for the hut, but had it built on a piece of David's land adjacent to his Inman Park home.

Two weeks after that first phone call – the Sunday before Thanksgiving –

Paul had his hut. The build was initially delayed to trim a couple of trees and level the site, but went very quickly after that.

After the build, David graciously allowed us to speak with him about Paul, the Housers, and their Thanksgiving gift. Here's what he had to say:

I met Paul about ten years ago in Little 5 Points. He was living in an abandoned industrial property. The industrial property was purchased, and even though they didn't develop it, they moved out 14 or 15 people that were living there.

I had heard about the Mad Housers back in '88 or '89. Then recently I heard a promo on WREK for the BBQ. At the same time, Greg heard about the Mad Housers.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 3)

THE BIRTH, DEATH AND REBIRTH OF LAW

It's the general policy of the Mad Housers not to build new camps. Instead, we try to find homeless encampments and improve them; that way, the residents have already vetted the campsite and their campmates. As a result, we're usually short on sites.

Sometimes, we'll encounter people who want a shelter, but have no place to put one; or alternately, what looks like an ideal campsite that has no people. But what seems like the logical solution - placing siteless clients on clientless sites - puts too much risk on the clients. We are willing to build on an untested site only if a client has identified it as a suitable for his needs and is willing to test it alone.

In winter 2002, we met one such client. EJ was new to the street, but he knew some of the folks at our Bankhead camp, and wanted a hut. Bankhead was full, however, so he offered to pioneer a site at a good-looking plot of woods that he had found. He expressed a willingness to let others camp there as well, if everything worked out. The land was secluded, yet close to transit and useful resources; better yet, it was unclaimed and unoccupied. We decided to take a chance.

On a frigid morning in March of 2002, a hardy group of volunteers headed out to build a new hut. In spite of chilling winds, they erected the hut in two hours and painted it a discreet flat black. EJ moved into immediately, and Law Camp, as it was named, was begun.

However, as winter progressed into spring, it became apparent that not everything was right. EJ's behavior was demanding and erratic, and we came to the conclusion that, while the site was good, nobody was going to want to camp with him. Reluctantly, we decided that it would be better to just let EJ have the woods than to attempt to make a camp with him at its center.

A few months later, in autumn, we took a survey of the various camps to see what each camp would need to prepare for winter. When we arrived at Law, we found the site a shambles. The hut had been abandoned for awhile, its door kicked out, its contents ransacked. Some items had been thrown outside and burned. There was no sign of EJ.

A few questions from nearby camps painted a worrying picture. EJ had tried to hustle one too many people

and had ticked someone off pretty bad. He'd decided to leave town; meanwhile, the hut had become a gathering place for unsavory and illegal activities. What had been a write-off was rapidly becoming a hazard. We needed to act quickly.

The next weekend, we returned to Law - but this time with crowbars. If you know how the huts are put together, they come apart quickly; we disassembled the hut back to its component panels, cleaned the site as well as we could, and took the panels back to the warehouse, where it would eventually go back out to house another client at a different camp. Law Camp was gone.

But not, as it turned out, gone for good. A few months later, a group of men who were staying under a nearby bridge expressed an interest in the same site. The site had 'cooled' since then, and the entire group was interested in moving to the camp. Once again, it would begin with a single person; but this person was more of a known quantity, spoken for by his campmates and by others nearby, including some clients. The new clients knew about what had happened beforehand with EJ, and promised not to mess it up. Once again, we decided to take a chance.

This time, Law camp took. Six months later, everyone who was under that bridge now has a hut at Law. The land around the huts has been cleared of the trash and debris dumped there over the years, and the owners take evident pride in their huts. One client owns a dog; another has a small fence around his hut; another client keeps his hut meticulously clean and painted. The last hut that we've erected, for Joe M., now sits where EJ's original hut stood, over a year ago.



Law camp, autumn 2003. Photo by Robin A.

THANKSGIVING (FROM PAGE 1)

Paul had lived in a tent on our property on and off for the last seven years. His health had changed radically. It was getting cold and we wanted to put him up. He liked to keep a low profile, but his health just wasn't good. We wanted to improve his shelter and still allow him to maintain both the low profile and his independence. This was a good solution because everyone in the neighborhood knows Paul and knows he lives here. This is the community he's familiar with, the community he belongs in. This is home, or as close as he's had for years.

NOTABLE QUOTES

Nice things folks have said lately:

Creative Loafing,

Best of Atlanta 2003:

Best Architecture Activists

"In a field popularly defined by its Gehry-style superstars and high-profile projects, THE MAD HOUSERS, a group of Atlanta-based nonprofit guerrilla builders to the homeless, create architecture that fulfills the most basic human need: shelter..."

david@sparesomechange.com

"Glad to see people out there who care, not just the homeless care about homelessness. I have been homeless several times after open heart surgery, but things are better (most times) since I get basic disability that covers my rent. Food banks and occasional panhandling help make ends meet, so not fully away from the streets yet... Anyhow, thanks for caring!"



CLIENT PROFILE: PAUL, IN HIS OWN WORDS

Paul is our latest client, mentioned in our headline story 'Thanksgiving'. Here's his story:

I was a Navy brat. My mother died when I was six. My father was in the Navy and we moved pretty often. I left school when I was 16 and pretty much took up residence in a local library. I'm proud to say I didn't get a typical American education.

I started working when I was 16. I was working in a VA hospital. When I was 20 I volunteered for the draft and stayed in for two years. Then I went to work doing high-rise construction. Sometimes I was up around the 15th, 20th floor.

When I was almost 30, I was riding my bike to get some groceries and I was run over by a drunk driver. I died 4 times, but they kept trying to resuscitate me because I wasn't wearing a DNR [Do Not Resuscitate] bracelet. I ended up in a cast for three years. The first year it was a full body cast. My muscles atrophied. I had to get a Teflon knee cap. After that I wasn't too safe up on an I-beam. I ended up going into home construction, nothing more than two stories high.

I ride my bike everywhere. I've ridden across the country 3 times-- twice to D.C., once to Dallas. And I'll be riding it up to Montana in February. These trips take about 2 months one way. That bike carries everything I own. I've had bikes stolen where everything I had was on it. Greyhound lost one of my bikes. What do you do when that happens? Start over. The bike I have now is a Panasonic. Steel frame. The head guy at Outback Bikes used to let me crash in his backyard when I first came to town. He gave me this bike. It's about 30 years old, it had been ridden maybe twice.



On a trip to Savannah I had a feeling something was wrong. But I never had a stroke before and I didn't know the signs. I sat down real hard and got back up with a stroke. I felt it coming on when I left here. Around Forsyth County I had a real out-of-body experience but I didn't know what it was. When I got there I called an ambulance. After they treated me they put me in a nursing home but I wanted outta there. That was a year and a half ago. I'm on disability now.

I've been in Atlanta for 15 years. Up until the stroke I could keep work under me. Now I can't. I can't write my name. I can't pitch a ball. I can't handle a tool. I can hardly walk. My medicine is \$100 a bottle. Every month I have choices to make. I either buy my medication, or eat, or do laundry and personal hygiene.

I first heard about the Mad Housers back when they were putting up huts at Hartsfield. I arranged for them to put up a hut for me at Kroger on DeKalb. Then my boss found out, had it torn down, and fired me. That was 14 years ago. I'm not going anywhere from this hut. I will definitely take advantage of this offer. My belongings, my absolute essentials that I used to carry on my bike, are going into this hut.

VOLUNTEER Q+A: ANDY D

We recently interviewed Andy, who has been volunteering with the Mad Housers for almost a year, and is the author of our website FAQ. Andy is a reporting analyst for a health insurance company. When he's not building huts, he enjoys spending time with his wife (and their dog) and doing some high-tech treasure hunting.

How did you hear about the Mad Housers?

I saw the October article in the AJC and I thought 'Building stuff sounds neat.'

Did you have any concerns about volunteering?

At the time, I held what I believe are pretty common stereotypes about homeless people, such as they are all shiftless and lazy, or addicted to alcohol and drugs. Specifically, I was concerned that my efforts would ultimately make their problems worse. I thought if I worked on a hut it might just turn into a crackhouse.

What changed your mind?

It was getting cold. I talked it over with my wife. She suggested that since the cold weather was coming in quickly, I should make a decision soon. That maybe I should try it out, see how it goes, see what the pros and cons are. I agreed with her. I joined the mailing list and that's how I found out about the first build.

What were your impressions of that first day?

Everybody was very nice. There was a bustle of activity. I felt like I was in the way more than I was contributing anything. Fortunately, I got to ride to the site with one of the senior volunteers and I asked a lot of questions.

Such as?

One of my concerns was the potential illegality of the placement of a hut. The feedback I got was really enlightening.

Any other impressions?

One thing I noticed; on the first build, one of the gentlemen who lives in the camp helped out a lot, even though it wasn't his hut. Over time, not only have I observed this gentleman continue to help with other people's builds, but I've also noticed that there's occasional involvement by other clients during their own builds.

So what keeps you coming back?

The free bagels.



All about the bagels

Really?

No, I'm just kidding. I enjoy building stuff, and fortunately there's a tremendous benefit. Someone gets to have a lockable, weather-resistant shelter. And I definitely enjoy how freely knowledge is shared from senior to less-senior volunteers. We're not told, "do this" or "don't do that"; the *why* is always explained to us. This, I think, is a good thing.

What advice would you give to new volunteers or someone thinking about joining?

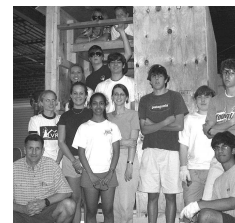
You should just come by and pitch in. Chances are that you'll find the builds pretty fun. And if not, there are many other ways to help out. You can help with Fundraising, Public Relations, and Outreach.

A TALE OF 2 STUDENT GROUPS, 3 HUTS, AND 4 ARTISTS

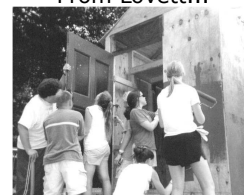
The last Monday in July was sunny and hot, a typical summer day in Atlanta. And at 9:00 AM, one group of teens was at the Lindbergh Home Depot buying plywood, lumber, nails, insulation, roll roofing...

The fourteen students and four chaperones of West University Methodist Church weren't from Atlanta, but the heat didn't faze them one bit. They had traveled from Houston to spend three days helping the Mad Housers as part of their summer mission trip to Atlanta.

Volunteers Nick and Larise were there to greet the vans as they pulled up to the warehouse Monday morning with students sandwiched in between the building supplies. After some safety training, the students turned to their first task. An entire hut's worth of assembled panels was already waiting for them in the warehouse. The panels had been put together by hard-working Lovett school students in June, as part of a summer Urban Studies program. Now they were passing from the hands of one student group to another.



From Lovett...



To West U Methodist

The West U. students transported the panels to the Little 5 Points Community Center and spent the morning assembling their first hut.

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

Newsletter printed by:

TransAmerica Printing - Downtown
www.tapatlanta.com
404.523.3363

(STRANGE, CONT. FROM PAGE 4)

The work went smoothly, and within three hours the hut was complete. The tired students then dipped their fingers in paint and proudly added their initials, handprints, and personal messages to the hut walls.

The hut was now ready to become part of ShedSpace. The artist trio Dos Pestaneos decorated the hut with their artwork and it remained at the Little 5 Points Community Center for the next five weeks.

After a quick lunch, the students were ready to get back to work. At the warehouse, Nick and Salma taught the students how to measure, cut, and bundle lumber for each panel. By the end of the afternoon, they were experts with a measuring tape and chop saw. They split into two teams and in no time at all turned a huge stack of lumber into two huts' worth of bundles.

Tuesday morning found volunteers Salma and Andy at the warehouse, with a bagful of bagels. But the students barely stopped long enough to eat a few bites before jumping back into their work. They again broke into two teams, and, using an assembly line approach, turned the bundles into side panels, floors, roofs, and lofts. At times, the clattering of fourteen hammers banging nails through plywood and studs was absolutely deafening. But the students didn't seem to mind one bit. Then it was time for some Q&A with Andy about site selection and hut deployment.

ABOUT SHEDSPACE

ShedSpace travels to different neighborhoods around metropolitan Atlanta in an effort to bring local working artists into personal contact with city residents. ShedSpace offers both emerging and established artists an opportunity to show work outside of established venues and allows community residents the opportunity to experience work in a non-threatening environment.

For more information, check www.shedspace.org

Wednesday, the students would take their hut out to a campsite and erect a hut for a client. Rainy weather, however, threatened those plans. Volunteers Andy and Jim eventually decided, for safety reasons, to cancel the build but not the visit.

"You don't want to work with large, heavy panels when they're slippery and wet," Jim advised.

Although disappointed by the weather, the students were excited to finally visit a hut site. Joe A., a client at the site, was a very gracious host. He allowed the students to 'tour' his hut and showed them his garden. He answered their questions and gave them a better sense of how the huts are used.

"At first, they seemed a little stunned at the reality of the camp," commented Andy. "Especially when

I mentioned that this was just one of [several] camp sites."

In keeping with the spirit of their mission trip, the students had brought two backpacks filled with useful gifts: a blanket, a towel, various toiletries, and some food. They gave the backpacks to two very grateful clients, who thanked them for all their help.

Thus ended the West U. student mission trip. But what happened to all the panels and huts that the students built?

The first hut, after passing through the hands of the Lovett students, the West U. students, and Dos Pestaneos, was taken down and then reassembled for Joe A. at the Stuart site to replace his ten-year old hut.

The second hut was initially used for a second ShedSpace installation in the Peoplestown neighborhood for artist Matt Haffner. It eventually went to James at Bankhead.

The third hut wound up being the sixth and last hut for Law camp, completing both its journey and that of Law. For more about Law, check out "The Birth, Death and Rebirth of Law" on page 2.

FEEDBACK FORM

- I'd like to volunteer
- I'd like to make a donation: \$ _____
- I have materials to donate
- I know someone who needs shelter
- I know a campsite
- Please remove me from your mailing list

You can use the back of this form for additional details.

Mad Housers, Inc. is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. All donations are tax-deductible.

_____ Name

_____ Address

_____ City, State & ZIP

_____ Phone Number Call me

_____ Email Address Add me to your email list

Send all correspondence to:
The Mad Housers, 449 Moreland Ave, Suite 002, Atlanta, GA 30307

BACKYARD BENEFIT AND BBQ

Thanks to all those who showed and all those who helped!

The benefit, held in the backyard of volunteer Cathy Byrd, raised \$500 in donations – enough for a new hut – and enough pillows, blankets and sleeping bags to keep all of our clients warm through the winter.

