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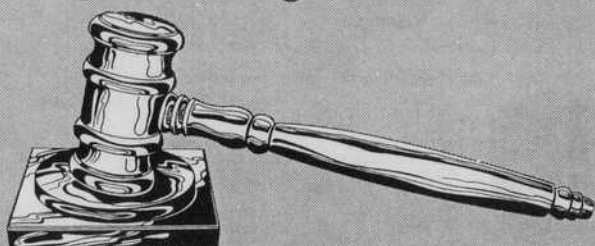
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Homeless get second chance■ Graduates of a renters
rehabilitation program
receive help finding housingBy **Darren Freeman**
Oregon Daily Emerald

Carl Mathiason had lost almost everything — job, home, stability and even his health. During his worst times, Mathiason seemed to fit the description of the stereotypical bum.

"I was a mess," Mathiason said. "I'd sit and drink with the railroad bums and do things like fall in the campfire."

Mathiason was homeless for about a year before entering Eugene's Second Chance Renters Rehabilitation, a program run through St. Vincent de Paul Society that helps homeless people obtain and maintain housing.

He took advantage of the weekly, three-hour-long classes on such topics as finding rental housing, landlord expectations, budgeting, housing laws, credit, self-esteem and conflict resolution.

After the eight-week program, he found a home with help of the program, which guarantees to reimburse landlords up to \$600 for property damages and defaulted payments incurred by any of its graduates.

"If the program hadn't been there, I don't know what would have happened to me," Mathiason said. "I don't know if I'd still have my daughter. I don't know if I'd still be alive."

Before becoming homeless, Mathiason worked as a firefighter in Idaho and badly injured his back on the job in 1984. After 14 years of fire fighting, he found himself unemployed and unable to do the strenuous physical work he had done all his life.

For the next several years, Mathiason received rigorous medical treatment, minimized physical exertion and drank too much.

He and his wife moved several times, had a baby girl and scraped by from one federal disability check to the next. Then, in 1993, the checks stopped coming when a doctor deemed Mathiason fully recovered.

After an argument with a landlord, Mathiason ended up on the streets in March of 1993. His family lived off welfare.

Mathiason hoped to find a home within a month, but his lack of references, unemployment, criminal record and bad credit rating made impressing landlords difficult.

The Mathiasons moved to Eugene where the weather is more temperate and job opportunities more plentiful. But Mathiason still couldn't find a home, and his family parked near railroad tracks and slept in their van.

"I'd wake up in the morning trying to be positive. But I was losing hope. We seemed to run into brick walls everywhere," he said.

Mathiason became depressed, his drinking problem worsened and he ended up in jail overnight. It was then that he re-

alized he needed to change.

Mathiason joined Alcoholics Anonymous and moved his family into a homeless shelter, where he first heard about Second Chance. He joined the program and graduated in the spring of 1994 determined to make a better life.

Second Chance founder and project director Tina Eoff was so impressed with Mathiason's dedication and determination that she offered him a job.

Today, Mathiason, 44, is a peer counselor and editor of a quarterly newsletter for Second Chance. Mathiason and his wife divorced, and he is now renting a three-bedroom house in Springfield with his new wife of one year, three of her children and his own daughter. He hopes to some day own a house.

Eoff can empathize with Mathiason because she spent six weeks living homeless near Armitage State Park in 1992. She began Second Chances in 1993 and in 1995 moved it under the umbrella of St. Vincent de Paul.

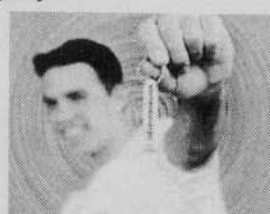
About 100 participants per year pass through the Second Chance program, which receives most of its funding from United Way.

"We can help almost everyone who wants to help themselves," Eoff said. "I think we've put a big dent in homelessness in this county."

For further information about Second Chance Renter Rehabilitation call Eoff, Mathiason or Vikki Perpinan at 687-5820.

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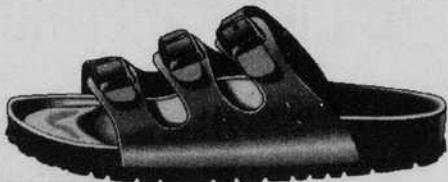
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