

Road from 1A

(NCH) is spearheading the effort to increase awareness of this chronic problem while also conducting studies that gather information for support groups at local, state and national levels.

The problem of homelessness is not new and it is not going away. Lane County Poverty and Homelessness Board (LCPHB) estimates Florence has approximately 100 homeless individuals at this time of year — number that

increases significantly during the months with milder weather.

Individuals who find themselves without a permanent residence can't be easily categorized, shouldn't be generalized, but are unfortunately often marginalized.

In an effort to get a better understanding and open a dialogue with those within the homeless community, I was assigned to reach out to a number of individuals who have found themselves without shelter.

One of the individuals who

agreed to tell his story was a 64-year-old gentleman I met named Barry Sommers.

I say "gentleman" intentionally because, after spending just a few moments with Sommers, one is impressed with his intellect and strength of spirit.

Sommers doesn't appear to the casual observer to be homeless. His clothes are clean, though well-worn. He smiles readily, revealing gaps that somehow enhance his wide, easy grin.

Sommers thoughtfully articulated to me the series of events

that brought him to this unenviable place in his life.

Our interview took place at a local restaurant, chosen because he had always wanted to eat there but knew it was out of his price range.

Sommers explained that his situation stems directly from a combination of the economic downturn of the past decade and with society's disregard for its older, displaced citizens.

"It started in 2010, with the worldwide financial crisis," Sommers explained. "At that time I lost my job and I had been unemployed for almost

two years. I had exhausted my unemployment and gone through all my savings.

"That's when I first became technically homeless."

The facts gathered by the NCH and other non-governmental service agencies show that most of the country's homeless have suffered a major financial set back, either at work or with their health — events that propelled them to homelessness.

This comes in stark contrast to the common perception that the majority of homeless people are addicts or "lazy."

The majority of people making up the homeless population are the result of job loss or financial crisis without the means — or the family support system — to recover.

It's that simple. Ironically, coming up with a solution, however, is extremely difficult. That's because there is no "one size fits all" solution to this problem.

Sommers recalled a painful, bittersweet event that helped him to partially stem the sense of helplessness that many of the homeless experience.

"My father passed away, and while he was by no means a wealthy man, he left me a few thousand dollars," said Sommers. "I used it to buy a used R.V. so I had a place that was warm and dry. Then I decided I had to get to a place where it wasn't so expensive to live. That's when I decided to

moved to Oregon."

Sommers said he is comfortable sharing the details of his situation because he wants others to understand that not all homeless individuals are helpless or unwilling to help themselves.

"After I got to Oregon, I figured out how to live on \$500 a month. It does entail utilizing social services and other safety nets that are out there," said Sommers. "But they are there for a reason."

Sommers has applied for work in town but factors such as not having a permanent address, consistent work history and age have made it difficult.

When asked how he remains positive and upbeat in his situation, Sommers pointed skyward and offers his broad smile.

"I believe that everything happens for a reason. I trust that God has a plan for me and I accept his will in my life," Sommers said. "I hope that someday I will be in a more stable, positive situation."

"Until then, I will make the best of where I find myself and try to find permanent work and a more traditional living arrangement."

Donations for today's Homeless Awareness Day can be dropped off at KXCR radio, across from the Siuslaw Public Library on Ninth Street, or at City Lights Cinemas, 1930 Highway 101.

Siuslaw Public Library, and City Lights Cinema at 1930 Highway 101.

This collection effort is due to the combined efforts of West Lane Hostel Committee, Three Rivers Casino Resort, Helping Hands and Siuslaw Outreach Services.

Homeless from 1A

501 (c)(3) organization, so contributions are tax deductible.

Drop-off sites are KXCR Community Radio Station, across the street from the

Celebrating the Gifts of Friendship & Community

As we wrap up another year, we think about how lucky we are to know good neighbors like you. Thanks for making us feel so at home here. We sincerely appreciate your patronage and support.

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