Students aid NYC homeless

By Bill Greenwood

Opinion Editor

"Dec. 24 and I'm not at home still at the park where I first wrote the poem/My girl and I were pretty sad/It was one of the worst Christmases we'd ever had."

So begins a poem by a homeless man named Michael in New York City. He has been on the street, for 15 years and to him, Christmas was just another day. However, this day was not like all the others, he said.

"No gifts to give, no tree to light/It/t turned and saw a peculiar sight/A row of cars, a string of lights/Hot food beneath the stars on Christmas night."

The cars he was referring to were sent by the Midnight Run, an organization that delivers food and clothing to the homeless population of New York City. A multitude of groups, ranging from religious organizations to colleges and universities, routinely send volunteers to aid in these deliveries. Rider sends a delegation about once a month that is led by a different group each time, according to Reverend Nancy Schulte, who organizes Rider's excursions to New York.

"I think it's crucial to learn the sense of giving back," said Schulte. "Students here at Rider have many blessings and must learn to give back to those less fortunate." Rider's volunteers distribute sandwiches, soup, clothes and blankets at each stop. Many of these stops are located on highly recognizable streets of New York City such as Central Park West and Broadway, said Schulte.

Students who attend one of these outings can expect to learn a great deal about homeless culture from those they meet, according to Schulte. Some are formerly wealthy businessmen and women who fell on hard times and never recovered. "These people aren't all drug addicts or bad people," said Schulte. "We learn as much from them as they learn from us."

This is the case with a homeless man named Bob. Bob was the manager of a prominent hotel before losing all that he had to a gambling addiction. He has been on the street for two and a half years now. "When I first got out here, I was desperate," Bob said. "I took solace in the Midnight Run."

Today, Bob, although still homeless, is involved in the organization as a board member. "I felt like I needed to give something back," he said.

Another man named Greg, who was once homeless, now joins Midnight Run groups and acts as a guide. He freely speaks about his experiences in homelessness and helps those who travel with him to understand his former lifestyle.

"One year on New Year's Eve I found $700 just lying on the street in Times Square," Greg said. "You know what I did? I took that $700 and got myself a nice hotel room for the night."

Greg said that a typical day for him would always begin at the Atrium, a popular stop on the Midnight Run. The Atrium is the lobby of a high-rise business building owned by another formerly homeless man. Since he knows how it feels to be out on the street, he has instituted a policy in which no person who enters will be turned away. As a result, many homeless men and women take shelter there during the day.

However, the Atrium closes at midnight, leaving those seeking shelter to find a new place to stay overnight. Greg, as well as many other homeless people, usually found their way to New York's Penn Station, he said.

"They would let us lie down and sleep on the floor as soon as everyone had gotten off their trains," said Greg. "You could also buy a ticket for $1.50 and stay the night in the ticket-holders area."

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climate of the 1960s. He made reference to the sacrifices made during the civil rights struggle in order to ensure that the basic right to vote was given to all citizens equally. It was "young people that made that happen."

Corzine said it is important for people from diverse political affiliations to come together to debate current issues so their voices could be heard.

"We have to have a national debate about means and ends," said Corzine. "We need to decide if the United States is prepared to accept means that are consistent with our values to get to an end judgment that we might think is the appropriate act."

He touched on issues ranging from the war on terror to America's assassination policy to this year's presidential election. One of the most important issues is the budget and tax policy, which Corzine said is "where the action is."

"Only a small piece of our national budget goes to discretionary domestic spending like Pell Grants and the National Science Foundation," he said.

The discussion about globalization and the outsourcing of American jobs to other countries are debates that Corzine said need immediate attention, in addition to the court system with regard to the Patriot Act and the "suspension of habeas corpus" in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks.

We need to do objective analysis to get the best answers, even though we may not always agree with the answers politically," said Corzine. "I plead with you to get out and vote. We will pay more attention if you move from 37 percent of the vote to 52 or 53 percent and you'll see the whole debate in America change if you all get involved."

Rider students who attended the speech in the Bart Luedeke Center Theater said that they appreciated his commitment and sincerity towards diverse opinions finding common ground on issues.

"Jon Corzine was down to earth and seemed to care about talking to the students about the issues," said junior Staci Pinelli. "He touched on issues ranging from the war on terror to America's assassination policy to this year's presidential election. One of the most important issues is the budget and tax policy, which Corzine said is "where the action is.""

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