

3-31-1998

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### Recommended Citation

University Marketing and Communications, "03/31/1998 - Shantytown Springing Up At EIU.pdf" (1998). 1998. 98.  
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98-112

March 31, 1998

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

"SHANTYTOWN" SPRINGING UP AT EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

CHARLESTON -- A new community will spring up within Charleston this week; however, it's doubtful that many would want to make it their permanent home.

Shantytown, a homelessness awareness project, will take shape just north of Eastern Illinois University's Booth Library at noon Wednesday (April 1). And for 24 hours, EIU student volunteers will call this "town" made of cardboard boxes their home.

"We tell them they can bring a sleeping bag or a blanket or two, but we try and keep that type of thing to a minimum," said Bob Shaw, site coordinator for Eastern's chapter of Habitat for Humanity, project sponsor. "No walk-mans, no radios. We want to make it as realistic as possible."

That realism will also include a "soup kitchen" for Shantytown inhabitants and special guest speakers, both at 7 p.m. Wednesday. The public is invited to listen.

The purpose of Shantytown, now in its fourth year, is two-fold, Shaw said. Ideally,

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it helps raise awareness for the need for decent housing -- in Coles County, in this country, throughout the world.

Secondly, Shaw added, it is a major fundraiser for the campus' Habitat chapter. Last year's project netted nearly \$2,000.

In addition to pledges collected by Shantytown participants, volunteer "beggars" will stand on street corners and at Shantytown with cans to collect spare change from passersby. Funds raised go towards the chapter's work with the Coles County affiliate of Habitat for Humanity, Shaw said.

Eastern's chapter -- about 70 members strong -- usually assists in building about one house a year within Coles County.

"But that's not enough for us. We're a real enthusiastic group," Shaw said, adding that members have directed that energy toward Habitat for Humanity projects in other communities, including Lincoln, Danville, Effingham, Champaign, Robinson and, perhaps soon, in Terre Haute, Ind.

"It depends a lot on the time of year, weather-wise, and who has projects," Shaw said.

Shaw noted that the cardboard boxes used in Shantytown were donated to the group by Oce-Imaging Supplies, located north of Charleston.