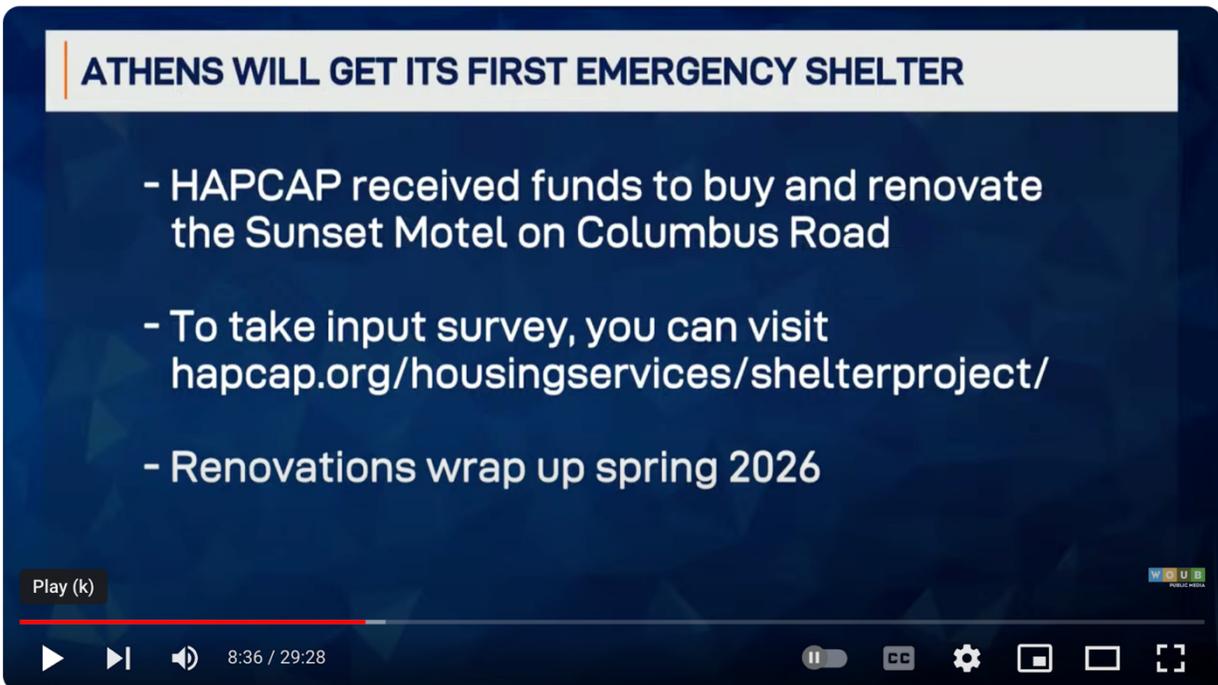




I watch our local PBS station WOUB. I am a supporter. I regularly watch the evening newscast the students do. I have always liked the broadcast even though it seems obvious they are learning a lot every night. I heard and saw this story on their Tuesday evening October 15 NewsWatch.



What grabbed my attention was the phrase **ATHENS WILL GET ITS FIRST EMERGENCY SHELTER**. I smiled. I felt sadness. This is our 45<sup>th</sup> year of providing shelter to men, women and children who experience homelessness in rural Ohio. We have provided over 16,000 consecutive days of shelter to adults and children experiencing homelessness in southeast Ohio. That is sixteen thousand consecutive days we have been open. When we started, we were serving 14 counties. For our first 33 years we provided *emergency* shelter. At that time, we were the only shelter in 9 southeast Ohio Counties, and we received people from all of these counties who experienced homelessness. For the last 10 years we have had to slow down the process. We stopped providing emergency shelter in 2014 primarily because we could not navigate or manage the increased drug use among those who applied to The Timothy House. We have continued to provide temporary shelter (and a supportive community) to adults and children from rural Ohio who are in the situation of homelessness every day. Instead of inviting people to come on the same day like we did for 33 years, people come the next day through a pre-admit and then come for shelter.

We have provided shelter to people experiencing homelessness in a residential neighborhood on the west side of Athens since 1984 when Good Works moved from the basement of The Wasserman's home on Elliott Street to the current location (named The Timothy House) in the late 1990s.

Good Works started as a personal project. I came to Ohio University in the fall of 1976, lived on campus for 3 years and then moved off campus eventually buying a home on Elliott Street where my roommates and I began welcoming strangers into our home in January of 1981. We had already been welcoming strangers for dinner as part of the vision we had for our household. Welcoming strangers to stay overnight was another step.

During my third year as an Ohio University student, I enrolled in an additional 2-year degree program for an associate degree in Mental Health Technology.

		GOOD WORKS INC.												CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS 1985			
		JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	1985 TOTAL	1984 total	1983 total	1982 total
Calls Received		82	55	46	87	54	61	89	78	59	37	64	56	733	446	276	163
Shelter Requested		32	22	26	29	20	35	31	36	29	17	25	19	311	251	178	144
Shelter Granted		16	14	13	11	15	12	14	14	9	21	13	133	127	114	86	
Transient		3	5	7	3	6	5	5	6	7	5	9	7	63	49		
Resident		13	9	6	8	9	7	9	8	7	4	12	6	93	78		

In September of 1981, Darlene and I got married and we volunteered to welcome strangers into our home every night. During those years, we both worked other part-time jobs and volunteered to operate Good Works every day. As we began to grow, and we formed an advisory board and later registered as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization. From 1981 to 1984, Good Works existed in the basement of our home on Elliott Street in Athens. As you can see from the statistics above, we welcomed a LOT of strangers, taking calls and welcoming people during the day, creating a “phone interview” structure that we use to this day. Back then, we opened the house at 7:00 pm, provided some food to our guests and asked everyone to leave by 9:00 am each day. From the very beginning, we developed “House Rules” mostly through learned experiences. Later I would come to realize that

providing structure was the first step in helping people experience stability. During those years, we welcomed people at all hours of the night.

During 1984 we searched for another location and eventually found a home on Central Avenue. It really is one of the first miracle stories of Good Works! In December 1984, Good Works relocated from our basement to the current property on Central Avenue later named The Timothy House. For our first 33 years, we welcomed anyone first through a phone interview and then through an intake THAT DAY. But as the opiate epidemic grew, we realized that to sustain our work, we needed to put some space between when someone called and when someone came for shelter. What we now have is sustainable and that is very important, very Important to the safety and stability of those who are staying in the bedrooms. I say this because we make an implied promise to each of our residents which simply stated says “you will be safe here”. One reason we stopped providing emergency shelter was because we could no longer make that promise. We saw too many situations where someone not in recovery sabotaged the progress another resident was making.

**Below are a few of the many different articles published about Good Works during our early years.**

# 1981

## community

The Messenger, Athens, Ohio — Wed., Dec. 2, 1981 — Page 9

### Adults Facing Crises Can Get Help at Local Shelter

By MARJ STRIGHT  
Messenger Staff Writer

People facing crisis situations and in need of emergency shelter are finding help in Athens in a new center for men and women.

In January, Mr. and Mrs. Keith Wasserman of Athens converted the basement of their home into a Good Works Counseling and Outreach Center. People are referred to the center by churches, Care Line or other agencies.

The length of stay is determined by interview. Most are there just overnight, Wasserman said, but the stay can be extended to a week or more if necessary. He said the shelter, in operation less than a year, has served 60 to 80 people between the ages of 18 and 75 "from all walks of life and backgrounds."

"This is the only shelter in the whole county, other than My Sister's Place (for battered women). The operation is supported totally by the Christian community," Wasserman said.

"The very basis and nature of the work is Christ-centered," he said, adding that six churches have agreed to contribute.

"When I became a Christian in 1975, God began the process of creating in my life good works and this is the outward expression of that," he said. "We seek to help them (clients) spiritually. If they are Christian, we help them walk in the Christian way. If not we help them to incorporate God in the circumstances of their life and see how He can see them through. It's a combination of Christian and mental health support," he said.

Wasserman graduated from Ohio University with a degree in mental health and has worked as an intern at the Athens Mental Health Center, the Residential Treatment Program, My Sister's Place and Good Works Counseling and Outreach, a program of three local churches. He is director of the River of Life Ministries, Central Avenue United Methodist Church's college outreach program.

The shelter provides two bedrooms, a bath and living room. Linens and bathroom supplies are furnished. Counseling is available upon request.

No cooking is permitted in the shelter. For financial reasons, the Wassermans are not able to supply food except on an emergency basis. Those who have no food or money to buy it are referred to the welfare office for food stamps, the Food Pantry at the Salvation Army or the church or agency which referred them.

Clients are expected to perform tasks assigned them to help earn their keep. They are also responsible for cleaning the general living area and bathroom.

No drugs, alcohol or weapons or people under the influence of alcohol or drugs are permitted in the shelter.

Support for the program is sought in the form of hot meals taken to the shelter or hosting meals in homes, food for emergency meals, cleaning supplies, Christian literature and donations to cover the cost of utilities. Wasserman said the continuation of the shelter depends on the support of the community. Those interested may call him at 594-3333.

# 1983

## Good Works shelter serves clients from 1 month to 81

By THOMAS RICKARD  
Messenger student reporter

Keith Wasserman serves Athens, Vinton, Meigs and Hocking counties, the Lord, and sometimes dinner.

But not necessarily in that order. With his wife, Darlene, Wasserman runs Good Works, a Christian temporary shelter in Athens that offers short-term assistance to people with any of a number of problems. Both Wasserman and his wife say they are born-again Christians.

"We are an arm of the Christian community in Athens," Wasserman said. "And by serving others in this way, we also serve the Lord."

The shelter serves as a temporary residence for transients, just-released patients from the Athens Mental Health Center, Athens Senior Center clients and unemployed workers just plain down on their luck.

According to Wasserman, the majority of clients seem to come from the latter category.

"The predominant problem today is unemployment and not having a place to live," he said. "We help as best as we can and work with churches and local agencies to get these people back on their feet."

Everyone taken into Good Works must be referred through an agency such as Careline, My Sister's Place, the Athens County Welfare Department, Athens Police or by one of 14 area churches.

"We will serve anyone referred to us who doesn't have a place to sleep," Wasserman said. "We even put a family up during homecoming weekend last fall that couldn't find a hotel."

Clients' ages have ranged from one month to 81 years, although no one under 18 can stay if not accompanied by an adult.

Good Works is funded by donations from area churches and several private individuals, Wasserman said. They receive no government funding.

"Philosophically, what we're doing must remain an extension of the Christian community in Athens," he said. "The government has done it (provided funds) for too long. It's about time that the church helps out."

The shelter has been in existence

about 2½ years. Last year 89 people stayed a total of 287 days. The center also received calls from about 80 people who, for one reason or another, never showed up.

So far this year it has served 23 people who have stayed 104 days. No records were kept the first year.

"Most of our people stay for one or two days," Wasserman said. "But we have had people stay a week or two. One woman stayed with us 31 days. In a case like that, we have got to really trust the person. That's my goal — to build trust."

Though Wasserman and his wife work long hours to maintain the shelter, they are not alone.

"We have a large network of volunteers so there is always someone here," he said. "There's also a network of households that provide meals or bring meals over, if needed."

Good Works doesn't provide cooking facilities or food, but has a refrigerator and freezer, Wasserman said.

"If needed, I'll make a meal for someone," he said.

Wasserman said he tries to set up a program or some goals for each person or family that comes to Good Works. The type of goal usually depends on the type of person.

"I've learned that different people need different responses," he said. "Some people need a firm response and other people need compassion. I just pray that God gives me the wisdom to make the right decision at the right time."

When he's not at home with Good Works, Wasserman works part-time for River of Life Ministries, a Christian organization located at the Central Avenue United Methodist Church. At these times, Darlene "holds down the fort" at the shelter. Wasserman says she doesn't mind.

"I think she feels a sense of contentment that we're about our Father's business," he said.

Wasserman said Good Works will continue, at least for the time being.

"It is my desire to open another facility, such as a lunchtime soup kitchen or a free counseling service," he said, "but I don't know if that would be possible. This (Good Works) is a 24-hour-a-day responsibility.



GOOD WORKS — Keith Wasserman sits with his dog Zor on the steps of Good Works, a Christian temporary shelter in Athens that offers short-term assistance to people with any of a number of problems. He runs the shelter with his wife, Darlene.

"It's important that we share what we have. And it's a joy for me to serve others and to serve the Lord in this way."

# 1984

local



NEWS photo/SUSAN J. HINKLE

Darlene and Keith Wasserman stand in their basement shelter for the homeless.

## Local couple seeks home to shelter Athens' homeless

By Melody Sands  
Athens News Editor

For the last four years Keith Wasserman and his wife, Darlene, have opened the basement of their Elliot Street home to homeless people.

Individuals who were poor, had been evicted, were transients or recently released from the Athens Mental Health Center could seek shelter at the Wasserman's house, which they called "Good Works."

The city police, county sheriff's departments or other social agencies, such as the Salvation Army, would inform people about the house.

However, the chore of handling the 114 people who stayed more than 300 days at their home in 1983 has become a burden the Wassermans want to change. Now they are seeking a shelter for the homeless to be run by a house manager. The local

Christian community has donated funds to the Wassermans for expenses, such as free food, sleeping space and some personal items, such as toothpaste and toothbrushes.

Some problem-solving counseling was offered to the guests, Keith said, or individuals were referred to other social service agencies.

"Our hope is that someone who believes in what we are doing will lease us a facility for free. We would pay the taxes, utilities, insurance. We would remodel and do upkeep and maintenance," he said.

"We are appealing to the community for help. We'd like to see Good Works continue. It's a burden for me and my wife, and for us to do it, we need another facility."

# 1987

## Poverty in Athens County

More than just a bed

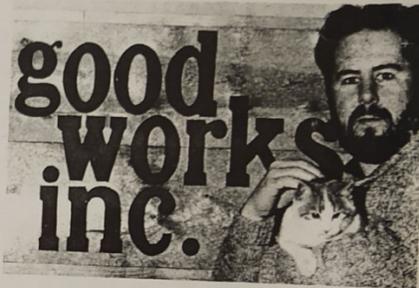
### Good Works offers warmth to homeless

By KAREN ADAMCIK  
Messenger Staff Writer  
We don't think about them, those of us who are comfortable, if not cozy. But that doesn't mean they aren't there. There used to be just a few of them, in the slums, criss-crossing the country. Some of them preferred that life.

But now their numbers are increasing. Dramatically. Rapidly. Thro-

welfare benefits. Those who work at low-wage jobs are not much better off. "People have the misconception welfare people really have an easy time of it," Schaffer said, but "a lot of times these poor people are at the mercy of their landlord." He said some people have a home, but cannot afford utilities.

The Ohio Percentage of Income  
That is, as a percentage of income



— Messenger photo by Louise Fish  
HELP FOR THE HOMELESS — Keith Wasserman began Good Works, an Athens homeless shelter, in the basement of his home when he was a student in 1981. Today, agencies in Athens and at least six surrounding counties refer homeless people to the non-profit shelter. The number of homeless who have turned to Good Works for help has risen dramatically over the year.

#### LOCAL

### Good Works

Homeless shelter celebrates seven years of service

By David Bruce  
Athens NEWS Writer

Good Works Inc., Athens' shelter for the homeless, is now seven years old, and to celebrate that fact, Good Works opened its doors to Athens yesterday in an open house.

The shelter, on the West End of Athens, is a comfortable, older two-story house. Upstairs are two bedrooms; one for families, one for single men and one for single women. Downstairs is a kitchen, laundry room, living room, and office space.

"We have a strong commitment to this neighborhood," says Keith Wasserman, founder of Good Works. "In fact, our commitment to the neighborhood is stronger than our commitment to our residents. If a resident jeopard-

izes our relationship with this neighborhood, we will evict that resident."

For example, Good Works has a no-loitering policy, Wasserman says. Residents have to stay on Good Works property or be out of the neighborhood. "They can't stay in this neighborhood," he states.

In addition, Good Works residents have mowed the lawns of the shelter, and Good Works has shared food that it was unable to use with the neighbors.

Everyone who stays at Good Works must go through a telephone interview first, Good Works serman said. Occasionally, someone does come up to the door, but Good Works sends them to a telephone before letting them into a

shelter. Through October, 32 families, including 55 children, had stayed at Good Works this year. In addition, 79 single women and approximately 140 men have received shelter at Good Works this year.

For approximately 40-50 percent of the people staying at Good Works, "This is the first time they have ever stayed in a shelter for the homeless," Wasserman said. Good Works estimates that 40 percent of the people staying in the shelter have a history of mental health problems of some kind.

One common misconception of the homeless is that they are a problem only in the cities. In fact, Wasserman says, 70 percent of the people staying at Good Works

Continued on page 14

### Good works

Continued from page 13  
are residents of Southeastern Ohio. Good Works has a commitment to serving people with roots in Southeastern Ohio, instead of serving transients. A person with roots in this area is automatically granted a week's stay, and can stay up to a month, while trans-

ients are evaluated on four factors every week, according to Wasserman.

"The first of the four factors is this: What are you doing to get out of here," he said. "We look in terms of people making trans-

#### LOCAL

ients, then we extend their stay if they aren't, then we warn them. We want to strike a balance between being comfortable, but not being too comfortable."

Other factors include: "What are you doing to do 'as much as possible for themselves,'" Wasserman says. "Other factors include: 'What are you doing to do 'as much as possible for themselves,'" Wasserman says.

# 1988

Community

## A Place Between Places

Good Works, Inc. Provides Shelter for the Homeless

On the porch of the olive green house hangs a simple wooden sign carrying the unassuming name, Good Works, Inc. The city zoning board objects that the house is in a single-family home area, and the residents are not family, well, not really. Even though the residents eat, sleep and sometimes worship together, they are not really a family but the temporary homeless of Good Works, Inc.

For more than 200 homeless people last year, Good Works, Inc. meant shelter. For Keith Wasserman, the Christian non-profit emergency housing was an outward expression of internal changes that happened when the Jewish student became the Christian founder and executive director of Southeastern Ohio's only registered shelter program.

In 1981, Wasserman, after intentionally taking five years to complete a college education, remodeled his basement, invested his own money, operated at a loss and served as the shelter's only staff for the first three years. This is obviously a risky way to get started.

"There is a time to take risks," Wasserman said. The director is grateful to have taken the risks and things have improved. There is now a larger house, a paid staff and state, church and private funding.

"It takes perseverance. That's the word," Wasserman said, admitting that the project was perhaps more ambitious than he first imagined.

"We serve the new homeless in Appalachia," Wasserman said. They serve families that have only recently come to know what it is to be without a place to go in an area that includes Athens and six surrounding counties. The difficulties go beyond the zoning regulations to include dealing with "professional manipulators" who take advantage of social services.

"There's a segment of people who prey on charitable services," two-year volunteer Bob Brooks said. He and his wife, Diane, are now more realistic than when they first came to Good Works, Brooks added. Before working there, they never would have suspected that

*"Sometimes people just need a hug. They need to know someone cares."*

*—Bob Brooks*

some people would be dishonest about their need for the service. They now realize why, although Good Works may accept anyone, not everyone can stay.

Another problem is that there are people who are prejudiced against the Christian base of the program's goal. That goal is to provide for basic human needs, shelter, food and counseling when people "hit bottom," one volunteer said. The residents, who come to Good Works through referrals from other helping agencies, sometimes need just a meal or a shower, but care often goes beyond the physical needs.

"Sometimes people just need a hug. They need to know someone cares," Brooks said. Caring may take many forms. Volunteers often take the time to play with the children or to supervise them to give a weary parent some relief during these difficult times.

There is a full-time staff to help the residents with direction and organization, but Good Works stresses personal attention. "It's not institutional. Help

comes on a person-to-person level," volunteer Tully Ross said. Wasserman wants to recreate a family atmosphere, so while he may eventually have an additional house or a larger one, he is cautious about letting the program get too big.

A sign in the kitchen reads, "The problem is not the problem. The problem is my attitude toward the problem," and Wasserman said, "a lot of therapy happens around the kitchen table. Professionals underestimate the value of an interactive community."

He admitted that "a lot of social services rob people of their dignity," but he still insisted on the need for establishing some house rules. Rules prohibiting alcohol, enforcing a curfew and requiring residents to clean up after themselves in the kitchen are a necessary part of group living.

There is limited space, and since there are many who need shelter, the director must sometimes consider a resident's age, willingness to abide by rules and other special circumstances to decide who may stay. Wasserman admits he has not always been successful in his choices. He has "learned more through failure than success," but he says it is better to "err to the side of mercy."

The staff knows Wasserman is behind them when they act and depend on him as well as each other. Volunteer Diane Brooks calls it a "team effort—a community effort, people from all walks of life are involved." While being a parent or having some background in social work or counseling is helpful, the strongest link between the director, staff and volunteers is Christianity.

"Christianity helps the most. We're all on the same level," Ross said. He suggested that the religious ties may be responsible for the longevity that Good Works has enjoyed against the odds.

Yet, in spite of the solid Christian foundation of the shelter, Wasserman insisted that the staff never holds the services up for ransom in exchange for religious conversion. Ross said that simply "does not pay off." He said there is often some hostility toward Christian

# 1990

## The Athens NEWS

Volume 14 Issue 26  
Thursday, March 29, 1990



Mike Hale, a case manager at Good Works, spends time with 'Allison's' children exploring the toy box at the emergency shelter in Athens.

NEWS photo-MARTHA REAL

## Rural homeless a growing problem

By Jeff Chappell  
Athens NEWS Writer

Allison, an Athens area single mother in her early 20s, never expected to find herself homeless, but two months ago she and her children joined an estimated 140,000 Ohioans who will have no home at some point this year.

Her story is simple. Allison (not her real name) was living in a trailer outside of Athens, she explains, "and it had some complications." Her car was broken down, and she couldn't afford to get it fixed. So she had to move in with her mother.

That was only a temporary solution, though. "My family was having a lot of problems, so I didn't have a place to stay," she says. Having heard from her mother about Good Works Emergency Shelter in Athens, a shelter for the homeless, Allison went there with her two children. "It was a last-minute resource," she explains.

The Ohio Coalition for the Homeless estimates that Allison and her two children are just three of the estimated 140,000 Ohioans expected to experience homelessness this year, along with an estimated three million across the United States. Of that figure, the coalition estimates 18 percent live in rural areas.

But Allison and her children are more than just statistics; her family represents the growing problem of rural homeless families. A 1989 Pennsylvania study showed that more of the rural homeless are families than occurs in urban areas. The National Coalition for the Homeless estimates that families make up 50 to 60 percent of the rural homeless.

While the Department of Housing and Urban Development disagrees, the coalition estimates that the number of homeless people in the United States is increasing by 25 percent each year. HUD puts the figure at 10 percent, citing studies over the past five years.

Continued on page 3

# 1990

## THE POST

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 1990

ATHENS, OHIO

### Shelter director tries homelessness

by ANDREA GREINER  
POST city editor

*"She calls out to the man on the street. 'Sir, can you help me? It's cold and dark, and I've nowhere to sleep.' 'Oh, think twice, cuz it's another day for you and me in paradise.'"*  
— Phil Collins

Network news and MTV have brought images of the homeless to television, but how easy is it for people sitting comfortably in their living rooms to relate to those without roofs over their heads?

Not very, even for one who has dedicated himself to the plight of the homeless. Keith Wasserman is founder and director of the Good Works Emergency Shelter Inc., which provides people in Athens with a "safe, clean and stable place to stay temporarily while they work on the issues in their lives that have made them homeless," he said.

But Wasserman said running the shelter for the past nine years has not enabled him to understand truly the people who come and go at Good Works. Thus, he decided to try to live the homeless experience himself by spending three days on the streets of Lexington, Ky. this past November.

"I needed to view the homeless as one who was with them," he explained. "I wanted to see how they saw their situation and how they saw the help they got."

What he saw was not pretty. "It was one of the most horrible experiences of my life. I was unprepared emotionally and psychologically for the trauma of being homeless."

In fact, Wasserman said he originally intended to spend five days living on the streets, but after just three days of dealing with uncleanness and the cold-hearted stares of onlookers, he realized he could not survive any longer. He even became physically ill.

"You begin to look bad, smell bad, feel sad. And you become paranoid, because you are, in a sense, overly sensitive to where people look at you. You know you stink, but when people give you a double take . . ."

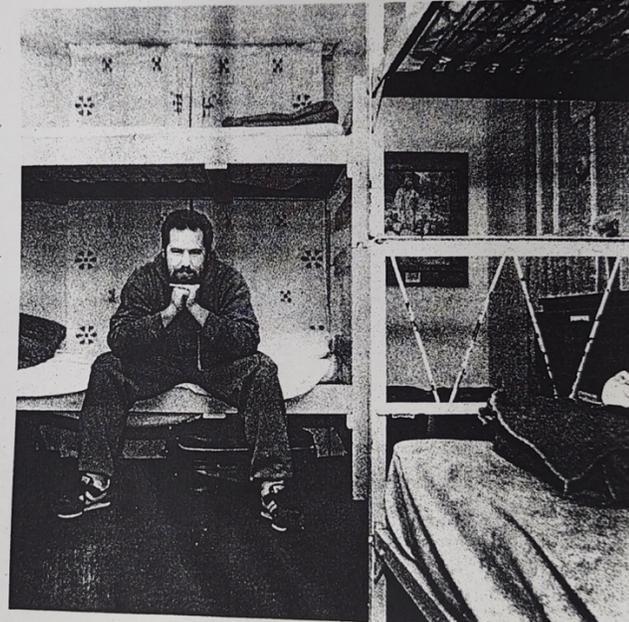
"Your thoughts begin to wander, 'What's he thinking about me? Does he think I need a job, maybe he thinks I'm crazy, maybe I'm crazy.'"

"These looks began to sap my energy. Just what does a homeless person do all day long? Wasserman said he went to a slimy, disgusting, dirty day center

running with the shouts, threats and foul language of drunks and the mentally ill. Fights often broke out.

At night he sought shelter at the local Salvation Army, where he was one of about 25 people jammed into a gymnasium. Amulies were provided with special accommodations.

But with only one supervisor and no rules posted, Wasserman said the gymnasium atmosphere was tense. People carried weapons and pushed each other around. Males and females were separated only by



Keith Wasserman

BRIAN ANDERSON/POST PHOTO

short partitions that did nothing to prevent wandering men from mixing with the unprotected women.

All of this was a stark contrast to the home-like atmosphere Wasserman and his eight employees try to create at Good Works. "This place is a palace compared to other shelters," he said.

While in Lexington, Wasserman also joined a group of men seeking work and ended up in "dehumanizing," he said, as the boss called him "Boy" and ridiculed and criticized him.

Some workers offered to sell him drugs,

and although he refused, others used their day's pay to buy the drugs or go out drinking.

"It's very hard to save money if you're living on the streets," he said.

And without money, there's not much to do. "Lexington is a beautiful city, but it's beautiful to those people who have money. Without money, you can't go in stores . . . you can't buy a cup of coffee.

"The city became frightening and ugly because there's no place to go."

And so, by the end of the third day, a weeping Wasserman made a choice a true

homeless person could not have made—he went home.

"I can't become homeless until I lose all my friends, all my family forsakes me and I lose all my money," he said. But he plans to return to the streets this year to gain further insight to the plight of those who come to Good Works.

"I have to experience a piece of the suffering of these people if I'm going to help these people."

"Oh, think twice, it's just another day for you and me in paradise."

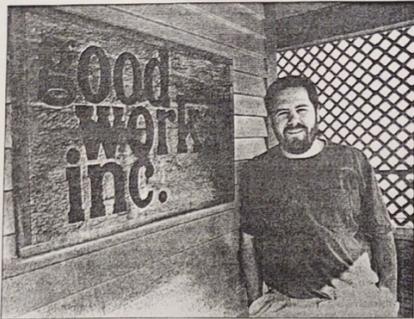
"Oh, think twice, it's just another day for you and me in paradise."

"Oh, think twice, it's just another day for you and me in paradise."

"Oh, think twice, it's just another day for you and me in paradise."

# 1994

## According to Keith Wasserman, good works



ASSAF URIELI  
The Summer Post

Since I have lived just three houses down from Good Works for the past 10 years, I was excited to interview Keith Wasserman, the director of the establishment. For his part, he was happy to know that the shelter had remained virtually unnoticed by me, a neighborhood resident. Good Works is a temporary shelter for the homeless on the west side of town. It currently hires 10 paid staff members, but relies mostly on help from about 60 monthly volunteers who work on a scheduled shift.

**Assaf Urieli:** Tell me about your background.

**Keith Wasserman:** Well I'm originally from Cleveland Heights. Sold drugs there when I was a teenager, was caught up into the subculture, and uh, really ruined my life till moved out at age 16. Then I met Christians for the first time in my life. I'm Jewish, and I'd never heard anything about this Jesus Christ unless my father got angry. When they told me Jesus was Jewish, I was shocked! Anyway, I began to follow Him, and it happened for me in a Baptist Church. I left that little town of Centerville in 1976, became a freshman at OU at the age of 18, and have been here since.

**AU:** How did you get interested in the plight of the homeless?

**KW:** In the year we started Good Works I had never heard of the homeless. I began trying to love my neighbor, trying to reach out to people who at that time I called "Displaced Persons", who didn't seem to fit into any of the existing agencies, who seemed to fall through the cracks. So, in 1980, while I was doing an internship at My Sister's Place, I began to dream about opening up a place for men and women who had no place to go. In the fall of 1980 I built this place in the basement of my house. It wasn't until two or three years later that even the nation began to identify the problem as being "the homeless."

**AU:** How has Good Works developed?

**KW:** Over the years this thing emerged from a one man show to a community approach. I started Good Works in January of '81. Originally, of course, it was a school project. My wife and I were married in September, and we continued to take people into our house, having not understood exactly what we were getting ourselves into. A lot of our rules, for example, came out of experience. I remember one night the police sent me a guy and he was drunk, and I took him — I thought "well, since the

police sent him he must be OK." Ugh, he was a disaster. I changed my approach at that point: I don't take drunk people anymore. It's too high of a risk. In 1984 we finally purchased our current facility on the west end of Athens. We don't publicize our address because we don't take any walk-ons. We want people to call first, and go through a phone interview. For our part, we try to inform law enforcement, social service, and the religious community how to get people connected to us, because we

feel that's the place they are going to be finding before they find us.

**AU:** What sort of folks come here?

**KW:** Today we have 16 people here. We have four, maybe even five families (another is on the way). We have eight kids. Some single men and women. With a variety of health problems. In three of those families the spouses are employed. In one of the families, both spouses are employed. Full time. And so it's just a matter of time until they accumulate enough resources to get out. All the homeless are not mentally ill and all the homeless are not drug addicts, but I would say that almost all the homeless have had a rupture in their support system of some kind. If you think about it, let's say you're walking down the street, tonight and your house isn't there. What would you do? Who you gonna call? My suspicion is you'd call your mother. Hmm. But your mom's not there. You'd call dad. If dad's not there, your sister, if your sister's not there, who you gonna call? You're gonna turn to your friends. Suddenly you're forced to evaluate the status of every relationship in your life. That's what trauma does to people. It causes us to re-evaluate the status of every relationship in our life. What's going on is that these people have gone through those relationships, and they're all found wanting. Now, some people say that most of the homeless are mentally ill. Personally I think we're all mentally ill. To varying degrees, the homeless are experiencing a degree of mental illness, but are the mental patients really becoming de-institutionalized and then becoming homeless? I'd say no, primarily. I think it's fair to ask, "What happens to the person who is going through the trauma of homelessness?" When they no longer have privacy. You know, we need privacy to keep our sanity. When we're always in the public we don't sleep well, we are physically exposed to people who are sick, doesn't stress do something to a human being? Yeah, you better believe it does. It causes people to go off the edge. So, which came first?

**AU:** How do you help them get out of the situation?

**KW:** Our first goal is to create a safe place. Secondly I want to make sure that this place is clean. And stable. And then we want to address what the underlying issues are. What's really going on? Is homelessness the primary cause of your homelessness? Certainly we

want to get people into alternative housing. But about a third of our population are going through what I call the "revolving door." They're in a shelter, they're back on the street, they're back in the shelter, they're back on the street. You've seen these doors at Penny's and Sears. You go up to one and you're waiting your turn to go in, and there's people going around, in a circle. But this time, they're neither coming out, nor are they going in. You try to get their attention but they won't look at you. So you think maybe it's one of those electronic doors, it's broken, and these people are caught up in some kind of whirlwind needing help. Unthinkingly you do the most loving thing. And that is the question we have to ask for each resident. What is the most loving thing? Hey, for some people the most loving thing is not always the kindest thing, and in this case, you put your foot in the door. As the door comes to this jolting stop, two things happen simultaneously. One: they do look at you, all do, at the same time. But they look at you with intense anger. As if they're saying, "Get out of my life! This is my door." And two: your foot is in incredible pain. And that's a lot of what we face with about a third of the population who are going around in circles. We're asking them tough questions. We're stopping the door. We're experiencing their anger. We come off like the tough teacher who at the beginning of the school-year lays down the law, and later you can ease up. You cannot reverse that process.

**AU:** How much does it cost and how do you pay for it?

**KW:** Today our budget is about \$150,000 a year. One third comes through the department of development through the State of Ohio. Two thirds comes from citizens in our community, citizens around the nation, who invest in us. And we consider it an investment, in our philosophical approach. One of the alternative ways we generate that support is we publish a needs list and ask people who maybe couldn't give us a dollar cash, "could you give us 10 dollars of toilet paper?" And sure enough, they will. We try to design a wide range of ways that people feel they can plug in. Some people give their time, but don't give their money. Others give their money, but don't give their time. And other people give their resources. We just had a person donate a dresser to us.

**AU:** Do you worry about adversely affecting the neighborhood?

**KW:** Our neighbors have to live here permanently, and there are a number of strangers that are coming into their community. And so we take a lot of effort to try to be sensitive to our neighbors. For example, our residents cannot sit in their cars and talk. We ask them to leave, or come, but not hang around. We tell them that loitering in the neighborhood could result in their being asked to leave. If they cause a problem for a neighbor, we will probably evict a resident. We want to send a clear message to our neighborhood that we want to listen to their concerns. You live, what just two, three houses down the street. You remember the incident, I think it was several years ago, when some guy came to your house and asked to use a phone at two o'clock in the morning. Well I cringe at those things. That's a horrible experience for me. I never want that kind of thing to happen. I can be as apologetic as possible, but that's an invasion of privacy. That's not the kind of thing we want to happen.

**AU:** As a non-Christian, I'm somewhat disturbed by philanthropy with a Christian coloring. How does Christianity come into this organization?

**KW:** Our faith is activated primarily in our goal: to love our neighbor. We want to make sure that people are treated with dignity, respect, that people are respected regardless of their race, color, creed, religion. There is never any kind of pressure for them to listen to any

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In October of 2015, Good Works hosted a public meeting at the Central United Methodist Church and our staff explained and announced that we intended to stop providing emergency shelter but would continue to assist adults and children experiencing homelessness. This link is to an article we wrote earlier this year which contains several news articles about this decision.

<https://good-works.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Beyond-the-Numbers-Update-2024-1.pdf>