



**HAWKEYES SPOIL WISCONSIN PARTY**  
SPORTS

**CHAMPIONS REPEAT IN STATE VOLLEYBALL**  
SPORTS, 1-3C



VOL. 123 NO. 308

# The Gazette

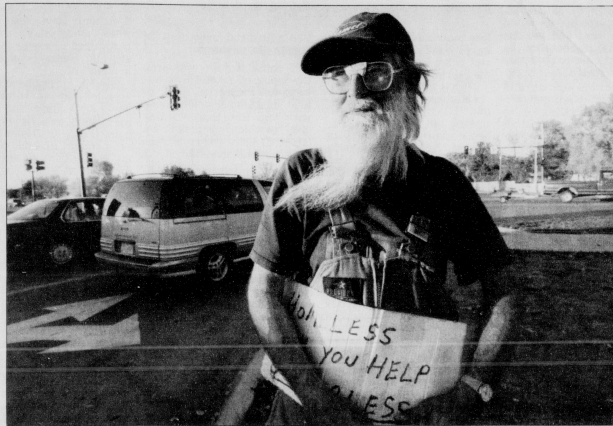
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**HUMANITY**

## END OF THE ROAD



Brian Ray/The Gazette

A man who asked to be identified as "Whiskers" panhandles for money at the corner of Highway 6 and Boyrum Street in Iowa City on Oct. 18.

### Panhandlers look at begging as last remaining means of survival

By Jim O'Neal

If coming face-to-face with a beggar makes you uncomfortable, imagine how the beggar feels. "This is humiliating," said Jeff, 47, a gaunt man with leathery skin and a black gaiter who often displays a "HOMELESS AND DISABLED" sign on Blairs Ferry Road at Interstate 380 in Cedar Rapids. "You think I want to be a bum? This is the only

way I can keep afloat." Jeff is typical of the men who swirl about the innermost ring of homelessness hell. Research on panhandling and homelessness, and Gazette interviews with seven panhandlers in Cedar Rapids and Iowa City over three weeks last month, indicate roadside panhandling is usually a last resort for men who have failed to make better choices stick. Not only do they have trouble making it in the conventional middle-Ameri-

can world of work and family life, they have trouble making it in the conventional homeless world of soup kitchens, emergency shelters and rehab programs. The Gazette reviewed sociological studies and asked Eastern Iowa panhandlers, social workers, law enforcers and even a philosopher to explain how a man arrives at Panhandling Junction and to offer advice to those who encounter him.

**On the Net**

National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week begins today. For information: [www.nationalhomeless.org/awareness](http://www.nationalhomeless.org/awareness)

**Beggars and choosers**

Increasing poverty and a growing scarcity of low-cost housing have contributed substantially to a rise in homelessness over the past decade. But people who turn to panhandling are not typical of those swelling the ranks of the homeless. Panhandlers overwhelmingly are single adult men, few of whom care for

► PANHANDLERS, 15A

**"People go to church on Sunday and spit on you on Monday."**

Jeff, a homeless panhandler in Cedar Rapids

### Election losers energized by process

By Rick Smith

**CEDAR RAPIDS** — No one mentioned the awful thud of defeat that would greet some of the 38 people who giddily stepped forward to try for a seat on the city's new, nine-member, part-time council. Who among the candidates — nearly all first-timers — had time to think about losing amid the gleeful rush to be part of a new City Hall? After all, who, heading into battle, doesn't think that only the people to the left and right will fall? Reality, though, hit in a hurry last Tuesday evening as many of the candidates,

many with family members at their side, readied for vote tallies to flash on a screen at the county's election office. "I was as nervous as a pregnant nun," District 3 candidate Chris Dostal confided a few days later. "That'd be pretty nervous, wouldn't it?" Election night, Dostal, a vehicle dent-removal specialist, joked that he most feared finishing seventh in a six-person race. Finishing third, 56 votes from a runoff out of more than 4,700 votes cast, didn't feel much better, he conceded later. "I didn't run to lose," Dostal said. "Losing, it's a mixture of emotions. Being an

old wrestler, you analyze what you did wrong and what you did right. And then you attack it again." None of Tuesday's losers said the losing was an event they'd necessarily wish for again. But most left the impression that, like the joy of a growing newborn, the delight of a campaign race can make the most painful part of the experience fade almost entirely. With time. Like Dostal, several of the vanquished said they'd consider running again, that they intend to follow City Hall issues closely and they

► ELECTION, PAGE 14A



Diane Crook/The Gazette

Cedar Rapids City Council at-large candidate Wade Wagner (right) observes the canvass Thursday at the county administrative office in Cedar Rapids. Wagner was defeated by a narrow margin by Tom Podzimek, who was also observing the canvass.

## Tornadoes hit Iowa

Elderly woman dies; damage extensive in central Iowa

**Inside**

- ISU stadium cleared, 1C, 8C
- Another photo, 5B
- Rain pelts Corridor, 1B

**STRATFORD, Iowa (AP)** — Tornadoes tore through central Iowa late Saturday afternoon, destroying homes and damaging farms, tearing down trees and power lines and killing an elderly woman. A twister struck Stratford about 5 p.m., destroying 25 houses and killing an elderly woman, Iowa State Patrol Sgt. Rod Hickok said late Saturday. Residents on the north side of town were evacuated because of the danger of leaking natural gas. "I could smell gas half a mile away," Hickok said.

Debris litters the area around a damaged canopy at Casey's General Store in Woodward after a tornado struck the town Saturday. Tornadoes swept across central Iowa on Saturday.

► TORNADOES, PAGE 10A

### Abortion again key as nominee considered

**SUPREME COURT**

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — Abortion was the first question out of the box at John Roberts' Supreme Court confirmation hearing. Hand-wringing over the same issue was rife during Harriet Miers' short-lived nomination to the court. Now abortion again is central to the debate over Samuel Alito, the latest nominee for the high court. For all the important legal issues facing the nation, somehow abortion and the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling always seem to elbow to the forefront of the

debate over modern judicial nominations, just as in the 1950s the court's Brown v. Board of Education desegregation ruling reflected the most important social issue on the American landscape. "It's always going to be one question in the front and center," Rep. Linda Sanchez, D-Calif., said recently from the steps of the Supreme Court. The same thought echoes from the right end of the political spectrum. Also, polls

► ABORTION, PAGE 10A

■ MONEY / 1D

**E. IOWA BANKS HAVE A NEW OUTLOOK ON LOOKS**

■ ACCENT / 3L

**SEE A NEW SIDE OF GRANT WOOD IN ONE-MAN SHOW**

■ TOMORROW / ACCENT

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**TODAY'S WEATHER**  
TODAY 50-44  
MONDAY 51-27

# Panhandlers/Most fail in homeless system

► FROM PAGE 1A

dependents, available research on the topic shows. However, a 2004 survey conducted for the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that families with children accounted for 40 percent of the homeless population.

Most unmarried mothers living in poverty are driven to protect their children and so are leathe to endure life on the streets, studies reviewed by The Gazette show.

When they're temporarily homeless — often because they have fled domestic abuse — they are much more likely than single men to stay with acquaintances until they secure long-term housing.

People who turn to panhandling often are unwilling to honor the rules imposed by shelters and organizations that provide interim housing, such as staying sober, looking for work and attending classes.

That's not to say every man who hits strangers up for money is a drunk who spurns all the help offered by government agencies and charities. Resources are overtaxed, and safety nets break.

Just ask Jim, 53, a one-eyed panhandler who works the exit of the Iowa City Wal-Mart. Jim, who wouldn't give his surname, said Iowa's human services system meets only some of his needs.

He said he worked as an electrician until he was disabled seven years ago by a neurological disorder that causes numbness, stabbing pain and loss of motor control. He said University Hospitals gives him good care, but when he's discharged, the bed stays.

He spent last winter at Iowa City's Shelter House, a homeless shelter that permits no one to stay for more than 90 days in 12 months. Since using up last year's allotment, Jim said he's been living in some bushes.

Being hooked into the social services system makes Jim a rarity among beggars. Most panhandlers who work the same spots for long periods are chronically homeless men, regarded by human services professionals. The Gazette spoke with as service resistant.

They commonly have intertwining, heavy-duty troubles — disabilities, mental illnesses, criminal records, addictions. Some have adopted anti-social behaviors — lying, aggressiveness, stealing — to survive on the streets.

Others endure by establishing social networks that reward cooperation.

Take Whiskers, 49, and his buddies Dale Doster, 53, and John Love, 43, who "fly a sign" at Highway 6 and Boyrum Street in Iowa City.

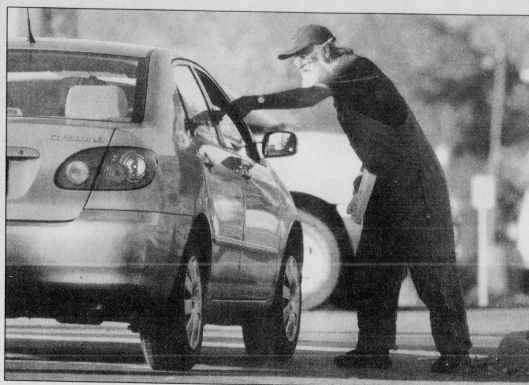
The three pool their take. "Whatever you make, you share it evenly," said Whiskers, who, having run afoul of the law, takes his sole moniker from a twisting white beard with a patina of nicotine yellow at the mouth. "We're one happy family."

**Everyday degradation**

Happiness is not among the sentiments expressed by most of the beggars The Gazette interviewed.

Most said they feel like outcasts. They endure insults and assaults. They feel resented, hated, degraded.

Jeff — who refused to give his surname or to identify the Iowa city where he grew up because he doesn't want to embarrass his parents — didn't aspire to beggary. At



A man who asked to be identified as "Whiskers" accepts money from a passing motorist at the corner of Highway 6 and Boyrum Street in Iowa City on Oct. 18. Brian Ray/The Gazette

one time, he earned up to \$1,000 a week selling floor coverings.

Then his health declined. Jeff said he suffers from arthritis, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, depression and a lung ailment he strongly suspects is emphysema.

Before his hyperactivity disorder was diagnosed, Jeff drank to subdue his racing mind and heart. Then, after losing his job and his home, he drank to blunt the brambles of the deep ditch into which he had slipped.

Drunk, he could fall asleep in the cold. Drunk, he could hold up a sign declaring his destitution to all the passing world.

So began the stogy cycle — beg to drink, drink to beg. He said he dragged the cycle to a halt 3 1/2 years ago, sobering up on his own by gradually increasing the duration of his periods of abstinence.

But while he can now pass the Breathalyzer tests administered by shelters, Jeff steers clear of such places. "There's some real derelicts in those places," he said. "You gotta watch your pennies — they'll kill you for them."

Jeff's home is a Ram 150 van stuffed with water jugs, coffee cups and blankets that he parks near whatever intersection he's working.

**Panhandling PR**

Beggars The Gazette interviewed said that, mindful they're in the business of requesting something for nothing, they strive to be courteous.

A 20-year-old woman who recently spent an afternoon "spanging" (spare-change-ing) at Dubuque and Washington streets in Iowa City said she treats every passerby with the respect she wants.

The woman, who identified herself as Andi Smith, thanked each person who gave her money and voiced a sincere "Have a nice day" to each one who ignored her.

Andi, the only female panhandler a Gazette reporter found in the Technology Corridor over the past several weeks, said rude spangers make for bad public relations.

Jeff agreed but said he understands how a hostile panhandler gets that way. He said his depression is aggravated by the unprintable curses shouted by passers-by.

The most vicious motorists, he said, swerve toward him

a vehicle on a public street.

The city enacted that ban in 2004 in response to residents' complaints that roadside solicitation was disrupting traffic on the Coralville strip and near the Wal-Mart Supercenter, causing safety hazards.

The ban applies to charities, as well as panhandlers.

**Cents and sensibility**

Despite a persistent urban legend that panhandlers make six-figure incomes, it's unlikely a sign-toting street-side beggar parked his Lexus at the Kum & Go.

A 2001 University of Toronto study found Toronto beggars had a median monthly income of \$300 — roughly \$23 in U.S. currency — from panhandling.

"It's all in the cards — how Lady Luck is treating you that day," Jeff said.

On a good day, Whiskers takes in \$50 to \$60. Jim received \$10 bills during a 20-minute visit with a reporter.

Andi said she took in about \$10 in the first hour and a quarter she spent spanging on a warm October afternoon.

**Is giving a kindness?**

Jeff's "HOMELESS" sign references Proverbs 21:13, which reads: "He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered."

The reference, while biblical in origin, embodies a principle that cuts across faith boundaries: Good people of means must help the poor.

But what is the best way to help a poor beggar? Even people inclined to generosity are reluctant to hand out cash for fear it will be invested in Wild Irish Rose.

That fear is grounded. The U.S. Conference of Mayors study found that

30 percent of homeless adults have addictions. Other studies report much higher rates.

Whiskers unabashedly acknowledged that he and his pals get most of their meals from service agencies and work their corner primarily for drinking money.

Shelter House Executive Director Crissy Ganganelli said the ethical solution is simple.

"If you're worried that they're going to use the money in a way that may be unhealthy for them, give the money to a reputable organization that provides services and resources to help anybody who's in need get on their feet," she said.

If you feel moved to help an individual on the street, ethicist Marcy Ducey suggested you treat him or her to a fast-food meal and a bit of friendly conversation.

"My concern is that these are persons — not just hungry people, but real persons with a whole range of needs," said Ducey, associate professor of philosophy at Mount Mercy College in Cedar Rapids. "Even if we do throw a couple of bucks their way, oftentimes we don't say anything. That's dehumanizing."

If you were to share a meal with Jeff, he'd tell you he dreams of getting adequate medical care and a temporary home where he can put on a few pounds, clean himself up and land a manageable job.

In his next breath, though, he'd tell you doesn't expect that dream to ever come true.

For now, he's glad he has the fortitude and grace to get by without shoving.

"I should be thankful I'm able to get my skinny ass down to the corner," he said, nodding down Blairs Ferry toward I-380. "I shall exist."

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Jeff said even some good Samaritans seem to grow disgusted with him over time. "They categorize you as a piece of scum," he said. "People go to church on Sunday and spit on you on Monday." Whiskers noted an inverse relation between wealth and generosity. "The people in the best cars treat us the worst," he said. "The ones that drive the poor cars are the ones that help us."

**Freedom to beg**

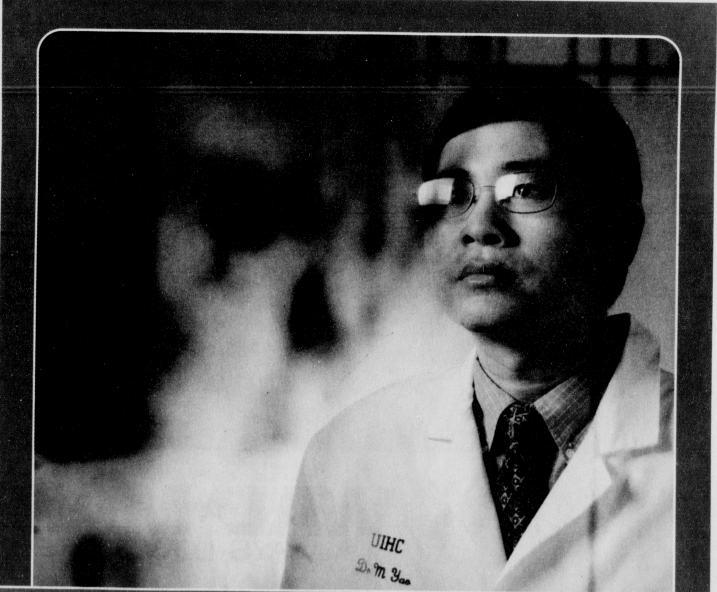
Sweeping bans on panhandling have been struck down as violations of the First Amendment. Courts don't accord panhandling the same level of protection as political or even commercial speech, but they require cities and states to regulate it with due regard for the right of an individual to make a civil request of a stranger.

Cedar Rapids once regulated begging, but the ordinance was repealed in 1978.

In Iowa City, begging is only illegal when accompanied by harassment, assault or fraud or when it creates safety hazards. City Attorney Eleanor Dilkes said her office hasn't prosecuted anyone under the law since she was named to her post in 1997.

"If they're not interfering with the flow of pedestrian traffic and they're not doing one of the other prohibited acts, they're fine," she said.

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**Yates wants to avoid retrial**

HOUSTON (AP) — Andrea Yates, the Houston mother accused of drowning her five young children in the family bathtub in 2001, doesn't want to face another trial if it can be avoided, her attorney said Saturday after visiting her in prison.

"She doesn't want to go through the process of a retrial," attorney George Parnham said. "But we are prepared to defend her all the way."

It was the first time Parnham had talked with Yates since Wednesday, when the Texas Court of Criminal Ap-

peals let stand a lower court's decision to overturn Yates' capital murder convictions.

The First Court of Appeals in Houston overturned Yates' convictions in January because of false testimony from forensic psychiatrist Park Dietz.

Dietz testified that an episode of "Law and Order" in which a woman with postpartum depression drowned her children and was found insane aired shortly before Yates drowned her five children. Such an episode never existed.