BY ANDREW KRINKS
andrew@thecontributor.org

Begning July 15th through July 30th, and concluding on August 4th, Davidson County residents will have the opportunity to head to the polls to cast their votes for candidates running for the offices of mayor, vice mayor and Metro Council. With incumbent Mayor Karl Dean facing few major opponents, public debates and dialogues will likely play a smaller role this election year than they did in 2007.

But democracy doesn’t work without dialogue. Thus, the likelihood of low voter turnout and incumbency aside, we use this issue of The Contributor, as we attempt to every month, for the purpose of broadening the conversation our city is accustomed to having about matters that concern our poorest neighbors. In this issue, we take the conversation to four people vying for the office of mayor, asking them to articulate what powerful (and potentially powerful) people are seldom asked to articulate: how, if (re)elected, they plan to concern themselves with our city’s most impoverished residents.

It is no secret that candidates for political office in our country do not get elected by advocating for poor and marginalized people. Even if a politician campaigns on a platform that appeals to the interests of those who are poor, it is a unique political leader who advocates concretely and consistently for her most marginalized constituents from the day she is elected until the day she leaves office. It is for this reason that those who spend their lives working on behalf of those who are poor and homeless often learn not to hold their breath for a government to end poverty or homelessness all on its own.

Which is not to say that a government doesn’t play a key role in the alleviation of poverty. It does, and indeed, democracy is not a democracy without citizens who keep leaders accountable to the needs of all a city’s residents. But just as much, if not more, a community is not a community without people who involve themselves in the lives of their neighbors. And whether that neighbor lives in the house next door or beneath the highway overpass across town, if you’ve purchased a copy of this newspaper, you’ve already begun, ever so slightly, to bridge the gap. But that’s only a first step. We hope you’ll read the interviews that follow to become more educated about what might come out of that came a series of recommendations, and now our poverty group is working to try and implement some of those recommendations...

Mayor Karl Dean
Incumbent Candidate for Mayor

Karl Dean was elected mayor of Nashville in 2007 and runs this year for a second term. On Friday, May 27th, The Contributor sat down with Mayor Dean in his campaign offices to discuss the state of homelessness and poverty in Nashville, Tenn., including how he plans to address such issues if elected to another four years in office.

The Contributor: The first question is in regards to housing. In the Poverty Reduction Initiative, which, if I’m correct, you were in charge of seeing into being...

Karl Dean: Right, we brought together a group—a big and pretty passionate group—to look at the issue of poverty, and out of that came a series of recommendations, and now our poverty group is working to try and implement some of those recommendations...

TC: In that Reduction plan, as well as in the 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, which came under Mayor Purcell...from my read of both of those, one of the fundamental elements understood to be integral to reducing or ending poverty and homelessness is housing—increasing the stock of affordable housing. And as The Key Alliance and others talk about, without creating housing first, homelessness and poverty remain inevitable. Also, The Key Alliance has some really interesting stats about the fact that housing a city’s homeless population ends up, in the long run, being more cost-effective than keeping people homeless—basically through the jail and hospital costs, which end up costing more than housing and wrap-around services would. So, with those two different plans in mind, both of which the city has been holding in its hands for a couple of years now, where does the status of housing in Nashville currently stand in relation to the goals that have been set, as far as you are aware?

[Continued on Page 4]

Candidate photographs at right, top to bottom: Mayor Karl Dean, James Keeton, Bruce Casper, Marvin Barnes

ACLU Defends The Contributor and First Amendment

info@thecontributor.org

Earlier this year, seven newspaper vendors received citations for selling The Contributor on the sidewalks of Brentwood, Tenn. These vendors received the citations under a local Brentwood ordinance that prohibits the selling of any goods or services on a Brentwood sidewalk. On March 17th, a Brentwood court upheld the citations and, subsequently, The Contributor appealed the Brentwood court decision. As a result, the local office of the ACLU was flooded with calls asking the ACLU to defend The Contributor and the First Amendment in Williamson County.

“The City of Brentwood has created unconstitutional and repressive restrictions that violate The Contributor’s First Amendment rights to sell its paper and share its message. ACLU-TN will vigorously defend those rights,” said Tricia Herzfeld, ACLU-TN Legal Director. The Contributor is now represented in this matter by ACLU Cooperating Attorney Irwin Venick and Tricia Herzfeld.

[Continued on Page 7]
The Health of a Home
Highlighting the Connections Between Healthcare and Homelessness

BY JOE NOLAN
info@thecontributor.org

While the entire country seems to have taken sides in the ongoing battle about the future of American healthcare, one underrepresented group is especially vulnerable to the change and/or lack of change that may be afoot: the homeless community.

Most Americans think that everybody living in poverty is eligible for Medicaid, but this is not the case. Poor adults who are disabled or are parents are most often eligible, but for adults who don’t fall in these categories there may be no safety net available. A non-disabled, childless adult—even with ongoing, chronic health concerns—will likely not find relief and assistance through Medicaid. Mothers who’ve lost their children to foster care and adolescents who’ve outgrown the foster care system often also face a tight squeeze between the rock-and-a-hard-place that poverty and lack of healthcare represent. A nationwide study in 1996 found that only a quarter of America’s homeless population was enrolled in Medicaid.

Homelessness and healthcare are so interconnected that it’s nearly impossible to consider the former without investigating the latter. Understanding the relationship between physical health, the cost of care and homelessness is in many ways a Rosetta Stone that clarifies the complex snarl of issues that surround homelessness. As soon as one takes the time to pull at the threads of how America’s healthcare system affects the poor, an understanding about homelessness comes into drastic, dramatic relief.

The relationship between healthcare and homelessness is cyclical, severe, relentless and pervasive.

Many people find their exit to a life on the street as a direct result of a health crisis. That desperate path is the direct result of a health crisis. And once a person is discharged back out into the dangers on the street, it’s only a matter of time before they make a return trip.

Facing up to these hard facts, many municipalities and hospitals have begun to implement unique solutions that are designed to break the links between healthcare and homelessness by providing shelter as part of their cures. Seattle, Wash’s Downtown Emergency Service Center has made a dramatic impact on the lives of chronic alcoholics on the streets of the Queen City.

Neighborhood Health Services’ (UNHS) homeless programs in Nashville, including the Downtown Clinic, the evening clinics in the basement of the Nashville Rescue Mission, and UNHS’ mobile medical unit. In his experience, homeless people are not only vulnerable to health threats from the elements and violence, but also because of lack of treatment for chronic illnesses and conditions.

“Of the nearly 4,000 different people who were treated at the Downtown Clinic in 2010, 44% had high blood pressure, 16% were diabetic and 36% had documented mental health and/or addiction disorders,” says Friskics-Warren. Among other patients, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, AIDS, tuberculosis and malnutrition were common along with the ubiquitous anxiety or depression that afflict most everyone who lives day-to-day with no place to call home.

UNHS has implemented a creative array of facilities and services to address the special needs of Nashville’s homeless population. The organization took over operation of the Downtown Clinic in the fall of 2008, and their mobile medical unit is also allowing them to reach into isolated homeless communities, making healthcare available to people who may have no means of making the trip to the downtown facility or one of the satellite clinics.

“The unit enables us to meet people where they are, whether in a shelter or at a congregate meal site or encampment,” explains Friskics-Warren. “Having to venture across the Cumberland River to receive services at our Downtown Clinic can be a barrier to someone who might be camping in Shelby Bottoms. Sitting in the almost always crowded lobby of the Downtown Clinic can be difficult for someone with fragile mental health or sensory integration issues. Knocking on the door of our mobile unit when it’s parked outside the day shelter where you wash your clothes each week, though, may be less emotionally or logistically daunting for some people who are homeless.”

Many may hesitate taking a trip to the doctor out of anxiety or inconvenience, but most in the homeless community make an even more concentrated effort to avoid medical care. With little resources available and few alternatives at hand, most homeless people will only visit a doctor by passing through the emergency room doors. As a result, a nasty cut becomes a limb-threatening infection and a seasonal cold results in pneumonia. The excessive costs involved in these preventable emergencies are ultimately another symptom of a healthcare philosophy that reacts to trauma and cures illness rather than maintaining health and promoting prevention. And once a person is discharged back out into the dangers on the street, it’s only a matter of time before they make a return trip.

Highlighting the Connections Between Healthcare and Homelessness

Afshan Kirnani performs an ear exam on Delores Davault at the Downtown Clinic. Photo by Raven Lintu

“Myoral Candidate Conversations” Continued from Page 1

KD: Well, it continues to be a focus. I mean, clearly, MDHA [Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency], the housing authority, along with other housing advocates, have taken the lead on it, and the city has been supportive. You know, we’re not where we want to be. Really, the simple fact is that because of the recession, Nashville, like every other city, whether it’s a large city or a small city, has seen an increase in poverty. It has not been something that has been immune to the national economy. There’s been an increase. So the challenges remain, and at the same time that you have the increase in poverty from people being laid off from jobs or having personal issues that result in them—because of finance issues—being homeless, you’ve also seen tighter government budgets. I think, clearly, it’s a major focus, but [it’s something that] we need to continue to work on.

TC: Do you have any parts of your budget or plan for the next few years—if you’re re-elected—to address, concretely, housing? Because from what I’ve understood, for instance, the Section 8 waiting list is thousands of people long. People sometimes wait for years to get in to Section 8 housing.

KD: Right, well, Section 8 housing and, really, almost all but MDHA supported housing, has been funded through the federal government. Long before the recession began, federal money going into housing has been reduced. And then, of course, since the Obama administration’s been in office, there’s been the recession, and there hasn’t been that new money coming in. There’s been some new money coming in, and some new initiatives, but the city can’t make up for the cuts in federal funding. We have operated on a budget where the government has essentially cut every year for the last three or four years, and so we can’t make up all the cuts in federal spending.

TC: What about things like housing trust funds? I saw a section in the Poverty Reduction Plan about creating housing trust funds.

KD: Housing trust funds—some sort of designated source of funding for housing—would be a great thing. Most of the suggestions in that area is to do something that’s tied to real estate transactions...but certainly the last couple years have been the wrong time to add additional fees to real estate transactions. They just weren’t occurring. So that’s something that we need to continue to look at. Bill Barnes has made a very strong case, and I find Bill to be a very compelling thinker in this area—that we need to do something like [housing trust funds].

Continued from Page 1

The Contributor • July 2011 • Page 4

[Continued on Page 9]
The “Gulch” Between Luxury and Low-Income Housing

BY NATHAN STABENFELDT
info@thecontributor.org

Near the corner of Charlotte and 11th Avenue North in Nashville, an army of backhoes and bulldozers scoop mangled girders and giant coils of metal cable into dump trucks to be hauled away for disposal. One truck kicks up a cloud of dust as it pulls out into the road while another truck pulls in to take its place, a demolition-site changing of the guard. The entire site has been cordoned off and signs are posted warning away trespassers, but one section of the chain-link fence has so much debris piled up against it that it has collapsed out toward a grassy field.

The Gulch has long been one of Nashville’s fastest-growing niche neighborhoods, and as of early May of this year, the neighborhood has literally been booming northward. What was once the old Polar Cold Storage Building will soon make way for Eleven North, a new 302-unit apartment complex being developed by TriBridge Residential, a development company based in Atlanta, Ga.

While the new apartments will offer pools, rooftop fitness lounges and connections to the Greenway, the current site looks more like a warzone, with the only remaining signs of the storage facility old chunks of wall still sporting graffiti and a set of stairs that lead nowhere.

Before May, when demolition began, the 130,000-square-foot building and the overgrown hillside behind it served as temporary home to many among Nashville’s homeless and transient population. With railroad tracks just up the hill from the site, the area was especially popular among train-hoppers in search of a night’s shelter.

Tax Incremental Financing

East of the demolition site, the downtown Nashville skyline simmers in the summer heat. The most-recognized symbol of the city’s skyline, the AT&T Building, was constructed, like many of the Gulch’s recent projects, with the help of one of Nashville’s greatest developmental tools, an incentive known as tax incremental financing (TIF).

TIF is a public financing method that acts as a subsidy for construction projects aimed at redeveloping and restoring blighted areas within a public sector. When a blighted area is redeveloped or rehabilitated, the potential for an area’s future financial profit increases significantly. Such improvements present the opportunity for new injections of cash flow and vitality to a city, and consequently raise the real estate value of the area, which, in turn, brings about an increase in property taxes, collecting more money for a city and its citizens. TIF utilizes a portion of those future tax revenues as a means of financing debt issued to pay for the new development.

Attempts were made to contact TriBridge Residential to inquire about the implementation of any incentives, but no one could be reached for comment.

Once an area consisting mainly of industrial buildings long fallen out of use, Nashville’s Gulch neighborhood is a testament to the power of TIF subsidies. Luxury condominiums Icon and Velocity, both of which were funded in part by TIF subsidies, were constructed during a period of heavy condominium development in Nashville. As Lindsey Krinks, an outreach worker with Open Table, an interfaith organization working with Nashville’s poor and homeless population, explains, between 2005 and 2010, roughly 2,000 units of luxury condos were constructed in Nashville. During that same time, she says, only a few hundred units of low-income housing were built or refurbished, all that despite the 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness’ recommendation that 2,000 low-income units be established by 2015.

“The irony is,” says Krinks, “many of the luxury condo units are still vacant, while the waiting list for Section 8 is 3,500 and the list for public housing is 1,500.”

While low-income housing developments are eligible for TIF, the city has traditionally offered the incentive to more high-end income projects.

Affordable Housing

Although housing projects like Icon and the new Eleven North complex represent the major trend in housing construction in recent years, the city has seen a handful of developments in affordable housing projects, as well.

Affordable housing is property that is buyable or rentable for a person at 80% of the area median income. A 30% portion of the tenant’s total income is reserved to pay for housing costs to avoid a disproportionally high cost burden. In a rental situation, housing costs consist of rent and utilities. For an owner, housing costs consist of mortgage, utilities and taxes on the property. Urban Housing Solutions (UHS), which owns and operates 23 affordable housing complexes in Nashville, is one non-profit that is able to meet these figures, offering apartments for rent at about $400 a month. Rent at these units is comprised of operating costs as well as any outstanding debt services on the unit. Operation costs equal about $275-$300 a month for maintenance and management.

“The role of The Key Alliance is to help identify basic needs and offer guidance to a congregation so that, as members step up to help a formerly homeless neighbor transition from street life into the Housing First program, they do not overwhelm themselves or the person they want to help,” Grossley Cooper said.

And according to Gammons, the program works.

“We have had nothing but positive experiences,” Gammons said. “One of the missions of our congregation is to reach out to the poor. Programs such as Adopt A Unit allow us to have a positive experience that keeps us wanting to stay involved.”

Congregations interested in learning more about the Adopt A Unit initiative can email Carolyn Grossley Cooper at ccoopernashville-mdha.org or call her at 615-780-7051. For more information about The Key Alliance and its programs visit www.thekeyalliance.org.

“Candidate Conversations” Continued from Page 4

And I’d like to see us do it. We’ve been talking about it for...long before I became mayor, and we still need to get something done.

TC: The next question deals with police and social service issues around homelessness. In March of this year, a subcommittee (the Committee on Police/Homeless Issues) out of the Metro Homelessness Commission presented findings that looked into statistics of arrests of homeless individuals for what are often called “quality of life” crimes in Nashville. Things like “obstruction of the passageway,” “public intoxication,” “trespassing,” things like that. In all categories, the findings showed that the number of arrests had increased significantly over the last five years. Some have argued that this increase is due, in large part, to the quality of life campaign itself, and not so much to an actual increase in lawlessness. What’s your take on this debate? Do you think there has been a disproportionate application of certain ordinances or citations to certain members of the community, or do you see it another way?

KD: Well, I think what’s happening...I don’t think I’d say “disproportionate.” You have this natural tension between certain quality of life type offenses—public intoxication, public indecency, when someone’s using the streets or an area as a bathroom—that are tied to homelessness, but that, at the same time, affect a neighborhood in a very adverse way. I think the police have to enforce the laws. It is a balance. I don’t think that they can just say, We’re not...
Cicada Memories

BY ROD COLLINS
Formerly Homeless Writer
info@thecontributor.org

With the return of the cicadas come memories long forgotten. Growing up in the South you get used to the sounds of the crickets chirping at night in the lush green forests and the frogs croaking while they bubble up and deflate. Summertime wouldn’t have been the same without those welcome sounds that signaled the end of another school year. But those nasty insects we called the locusts didn’t get the delightful reception that the glowing fireflies did with their lights so golden-green.

I remember the terror I felt the first time cicadas came and seemed to fly so erratically with no direction at all in mind. They brought upon me such a sense of dread for the outdoors that I seemed to be running away from monsters in a horror movie that definitely wouldn’t end well. There was nothing anyone could say to calm my fears after they had flown into my hair like a hive of bees. Outside was dangerous, indeed! Thankfully, they didn’t get to stick around that long.

I spent most of the season at my Granny’s house on a street called Moore Avenue. The grown-ups usually referred to it as “Poor Avenue,” since poverty reigned supreme in our particular hood. We didn’t know much about other cultures or races, except for what we saw on TV, but we knew that we were called “poor white trash,” and from looking around, it seemed that everybody needed more of something. Of course, more money seemed to be the obvious answer to our problems; but I knew that more love was what we all really needed.

Little Granny was a real piece of work. She had raised nine children on her own and was too proud to accept Welfare. The only thing we really knew about her was that he liked his whiskey, smokes and cinnamon chewing gum. Most important, he had left Little Granny strapped with all those kids! It left her bitter and forever ruminating over the past. I can still see her sipping her instant coffee from the saucer instead of the cup. She liked to blow on it to get the temperature just right. Morning after morning she sat at the kitchen table reading her Holy Bible out loud, only looking up to glance at her precious plants that she watered more than she cared for us. We were called heathens and animals that needed to be trained right. It was crystal clear that she didn’t want to raise her children’s children, about twelve of us each summer day. I overheard one of the neighbors refer to her as “The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe,” and I knew the rest of that nursery rhyme.

Looking back now, she probably had obsessive compulsive disorder since she cleaned the house spotless each and every day. We were forced outside with those nasty, flying insects and were chased out with a broom if we attempted to come in for a drink of water or a mayonnaise sandwich on light bread. Occasionally, I would ask if I could watch The Young and the Restless with her and lay my head on her lap. She would look at me with that hair of hers stretched back tightly into a severe bun, and peer over her cat-eye glasses and say, “Just for a minute or two, I reckon.” Her lap felt like a cold and jaded stone. Even still, I would tell her that I loved her and wait for a reply that never came. The pintos beans would always call for her attention, and my special time with Little Granny swiftly ended.

So with the fear of attack and certain death in my heart, I returned to the front yard that had been rubbed clean of any grass so many children’s feet over the years and prayed that the cicadas would leave me to dream of my escape from the ceaseless wanting on Moore Avenue. I guess those cicadas still bug me today.

My People (One Hell of a Crowd!)

BY GARY “MOOSE” ELLISON
Formerly Homeless Writer
info@thecontributor.org

For a number of years I’ve hung out and run around with a kind of rough crowd of people. It’s a smorgasbord of drunks, prostitutes, thieves, liars, gluttons, adulterers and murderers. Just a regular (you name it!) hell of a crowd.

Although some people are really good at heart, a lot of them aren’t so much. I try to help the ones that I can and sometimes some of them help me too. Some try their best to live a good life, and some don’t even try. Nonetheless, I feel a kinship and common bond, like a brother/sister kind of thing. I try to accept them, each and every one on an individual basis—live and let live.

By the way, who says going to church isn’t any fun? This is the rough crowd I’m talking about! It’s better than any reality show! If you want a reality show, follow me around for a week or two.

Don’t go to church for the Lord on Sunday and live like the devil the rest of the week!

Be true to yourself.

Just wait ’til I write about the “homeless crowd”—then it’ll really get interesting!

My Grandmother (1918-2011)

BY EDWIN LEARNARD
Formerly Homeless Writer
info@thecontributor.org

My grandmother, Constance K. Till, was born on August 20, 1918. She died on April 23, 2011. She may have been gone, but she left an indelible impression on me that will never be forgotten.

My grandmother possessed unbridled courage and willpower. I can remember an incident that epitomized these traits. In 1989, a neighbor was heckling her. I went inside my grandma’s house where I told her about the incident. When I left the house later, she went outside with me. She said, “If that guy says anything to you again, I’m going to tell him off.” She would stick up for me when no one else would. (Nothing else happened between me and the gentleman, and we eventually reconciled our differences.)

My grandmother instilled good values in me. She encouraged me to do things in an honest and ethical manner. She told me how to stick up for myself without hitting someone. She told me to look at the inside of a person more than the outside and to not be superficial.

Besides being a loyal and steadfast family member, my grandma was arguably the best friend I ever had. When many of my “friends” ran away from their problems, she stood by me. During adversity, you find out who your true friends are. She proved beyond any doubt that she was one of them. She was there for me in good times and bad.

Like me, my grandma was an avid sports fan and had a comical side to her. On October 15, 1988, a-hobby-ling, injured Kirk Gibson came to bat for the Los Angeles Dodgers at the bottom of the ninth inning in game one of the World Series against the Oakland A’s. In the at-bat, Gibson hit a two-run homerun that won the game for the Dodgers. A flabbergasted Jack Buck, who called the game, said after the homerun, “I don’t believe what I just saw!” Sometime after the game, my grandma said, “What? You never saw someone hit a homerun before?” I laughed uncontrollably. Even though my grandmother had basically a stern and serious disposition, she could be face-tious when she wanted to.

Constance K. Till lived to be almost 93 years old. She lived a good, full life—one that was about honesty and integrity. She possessed good morals and scruples. She was not only a loyal family member, but also a good friend and a mentor. At 4 feet 11 inches, she may have been diminutive in stature, but she stood taller in my eyes than anyone I have ever known. She was a resilient woman who always bounced back from a negative experience. When I count my blessings, I count her twice. Rest in peace, grandma. I will see you again one day.

TC: Yeah, I agree. And I think you just hit on it there—one of the major problems is really just the stark lack of restrooms that are available to the public if you’re not already a purchasing customer at, say, a Subway or something like that. We’ve also interacted with folks who, quite literally, were waiting on the bus on the edge of the sidewalk, put their bag down to rest—they’ve been trucking around town all day long—and before they know it, they’ve got a citation in their hand. And so, I think a lot of times, at least from our observation, when there aren’t many places for people to go, especially when the housing situation is as it is, arresting folks and giving citations for these kinds of things might be inevitable. Hence, what the committee put forth is that social services should be able to be involved when an officer comes upon someone doing something illegal—rather than giving citations for all these acts, perhaps looking into contacting social service agencies to connect them with services rather than continue to [escalate] jail costs.

KD: Right. Jail doesn’t do much for somebody… You know, when I was a young public defender—or a middle-aged public defender—I worked with Charlie Strobel and others to create a program where real people who were picked up for public intoxication were brought
to the Guest House, instead of being brought to the jail. You know, I’d seen [detainees] go into the drunk tank, their medical needs aren’t met, and they essentially just dry out, or not dry out, over a period of time, and nothing happens. And I think what Charlie Strobel did is a great thing. That’s a good model, and I think that’s what we should strive for. But, again, I think, if there are repeat offenders, and if there is a sense that there is a lack of safety on public streets, I think the police just have to do their jobs... I don’t know what a citation accomplishes, as in many cases, but again, I think the police have to enforce the laws as written. I don’t think it’s something you just ignore. The laws are on the book for a reason. That’s what the legislative bodies have voted for and passed.

TC: Sure. That makes sense. I would just hope that it’s at least part of the conversation more—that we can find viable alternatives other than...

KD: Well I think that’s the answer, is to look for viable alternatives, whether to create a day center or places where people can go during the day, if there’d be someplace where they’d have access to food and to restrooms, then you want people to use them. But it’s a difficult issue. And some of the people who are most engaged in making Nashville an interesting urban area are the people who live downtown and who just want to live in a way where they think they’re safe, and their kids are safe, and their families are safe, and they’re able to move around, they don’t feel intimidated, they don’t feel like, every time they go outside, they’re gonna witness something they don’t want to see. And I don’t think that’s unreasonable for anybody to ask for. And I think our police, particularly our Downtown Central Precinct, they have been very good about working with all groups. They certainly hear when residents have problems, but I think they are also very good at talking to folks about homelessness issues and working with the homeless. We’ve been very proactive during periods of bad weather, of asking our police and others to go out and warn people and to help people get off the streets when they need to. We’ve really stepped that up, and I think they do a good job. And I know that in their hearts they’re very compassionate people.

TC: In your recent budget address you mention, as you have many times before, that three of your main priorities for Nashville are education, public safety and economic development, all of which you suggest are interconnected. Metro Nashville Public Schools reports that there are more than 2,000 students in their system who they identify as homeless. The HERO Program was started to address this, and other programs and non-profits in the city such as Safe Haven Family Shelter address family and child homelessness. My question is, since education is so important in your campaign and administration, what measures, in your budget, will specifically address the issue of child and family homelessness—a population that has increased in recent years?

KD: Schools have bad programs that have been geared toward the homeless. To me, the ultimate cure to the poverty issue is education, making good education available to all children. And it seems to me that some of the things we’ve done in terms of creating the afterschool programming for middle school kids, particularly kids who need a place to go after school—maybe they don’t have a home to go to, or they just want to get extra services in terms of tutoring, or cultural services—those have been very positive. I think the investment we’ve made in education, which has been something which actually increased the budget during the recession—it fundamentally goes to the idea that we want all kids to receive an education. And the fact is, a huge portion of children in our public school system qualify for free and reduced lunch, [or] need additional services, and we’re trying to provide them. We’re very interested in the truancy issue—keeping track of who’s in school and who’s not in school. When kids move from school to school or they’re pulled out of school because of homelessness conditions, by emphasizing the importance of taking attendance and being aware of where kids are and knowing that we want to encourage kids to be in school, I think that results in more of an outreach to families. I certainly worry about younger children, where that’s more difficult to do... But we’ve put a lot of resources—beyond the school budget—into the regular metro general budget to fund the attendance center, to fund afterschool programming, to do what we can to help kids who need our help. And I think keeping track of attendance and encouraging those who are not attending school to attend school is probably one of the best things we can do.

TC: I would guess that a lot of the reasons behind issues of attendance, for some, has to do with poverty in the first place—their home situation, or their lack of a home situation.

KD: Right, transportation falls through, their parents are moving around. And that’s what happens sometimes—kids move out of school districts, and then it’s harder to keep up with them.

[Continued on Page 11]
The main thing that I would do would be to focus on poverty and homelessness in our own city? And if reelected, how do you intend to be the most effective ways of addressing homelessness and poverty? What do you understand to be the causes and what do you take to understand to be integral to the reduction and/or end of Chronic Homelessness (initiated under Mayor Dean) as well as in the city’s 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (initiated under Mayor Purcell), one of the fundamental elements understood to be integral to the reduction and/or end of the city’s 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.

But our schools, in the last couple of years, have really done a remarkable job of improving their attendance-keeping, and making attendance and following up on kids who aren’t showing up a priority. And whether they’re not coming because of family issues or they’re not coming because they’re tired and sleeping in...we’ve got to communicate to the family and to the kids, that we want them in school. And if the kid is homeless or if a kid is in a very impoverished circumstance, it’s even more important because the school may be the only place they’re getting a decent meal, and a lot of other things.

TC: What is your personal philosophy for addressing homelessness and poverty? What do you understand to be the causes and what do you take to be the most effective ways of addressing homelessness and poverty? And if reelected, how do you intend to make Nashville a leader in significantly reducing poverty and homelessness in our own city?

KD: The main thing that I would do would be to follow and support our Poverty Council—the group that Howard Gentry is chairing and [that] involves our social service department—to make sure that we are doing whatever we can to help reduce poverty. And that includes being aggressive on the sort of low-hanging fruit, the things we need to work on, and then longer-term goals. I’m very serious about that. I brought Tam Gordon into the mayor’s office, who has a real passion about this issue. She started several months ago. We’re going to focus on this. It’s a priority. I think the group has done great work and I want to see that the poverty initiative works. That’s the main thing. And then the other thing I would emphasize is just the priorities that I’ve established [which] I think affect homelessness and poverty. If you have good schools, you’re going to affect the poverty rate. Everybody’s got different plans or ideas on how you address poverty, but I think fundamentally it boils down to giving people a good education and creating an economic environment where they can get jobs. And to do that you have to be a city with schools that attract people and keep people; you’ve got to be a city that is safe, where people feel it’s safe to be in the city, to go to school, to do whatever. Public safety’s a huge priority. And then economic development. The bottom line is, the only way out of poverty is to create jobs, create opportunities, and that’s what our focus has been.

TC: Speaking of economic development, some Cal Turner fellows from Vanderbilt recently did a project where they went to Charlotte and interviewed some housing development people there, and one of the folks there said that every $1 in a housing trust fund turns into $5 back to the city in economic development. Have you heard any stats like that before?

KD: Having good housing and solving the homelessness problem through housing has a lot of benefits. Kids who are in a stable environment in terms of housing, whether they’re faced with poverty issues or not, are more likely to stay in school, they’re more likely to succeed. If a kid is constantly being moved around because of housing issues, that makes success in school so much harder. Housing also provides, I think, the basis on which a family or a person can get themselves established enough to where they can participate in the economy, where they can get a job, hold onto a job, and succeed. So housing is key. I agree with that. But it’s a difficult issue to crack because of the economy and because of the various restraints imposed upon us because of that. And I can’t promise that we’ll do a housing trust fund during the next four years, but it’s certainly something I’d like to see us get done. Like I said, it’s a good idea, we’ve talked about it for 20 years or more, and it’s something that would be of benefit to the city. The whole model for Habitat for Humanity [shows] the benefits of what housing does for a family, what it does for a community.

TC: Yeah. And your own administration has shown that there are creative ways to fund projects in the midst of a recession, like with the convention center, with the hotel taxes, things like that. So we definitely hope to see some more creative things, because clearly the recession is still lingering...

KD: Yeah, and a good example would be, with the convention center...we’ve tried to make sure that minority groups and others locally are getting a chance to get some of that work. The more people we can get employed and working, the better. It really comes down, for me, to jobs, safety, and schools—and schools probably being the most important.

James Keeton is married and has two adult children. He is employed in information technology and has run his own IT consulting business. He has also worked in banking and education. A resident of Nashville for over 25 years, he received both his BA and MA degrees from Trevecca Nazarene University.

Bruce Casper was born in Omaha, Neb. He has lived in Nashville for seven years. At 37 years old, he has been homeless on and off for a total of 17 years. He sells The Contributor and has a dog named Baby Girl.

Marvin Barnes is a native Nashvillian (his great great grandfather moved here from North Carolina). Raised on a farm where he worked for many years with his father, he later worked in construction, which he did until 2001. He graduated from White’s Creek High School with high honors from the vocational department. He has a wife and two children.

The Contributor: In Nashville’s Poverty Reduction Initiative Plan (initiated under Mayor Dean) as well as in the city’s 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (initiated under Mayor Purcell), one of the fundamental elements understood to be integral to the reduction and/or end of the city’s 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.

[Continued on Page 15]
poverty and homelessness is increasing the city's stock of affordable housing. As The Key Alliance and others suggest, without first providing sufficient housing options to the poorest of the poor, homelessness will remain inevitable for thousands of people in our city. The Key Alliance also makes the case that it costs a city significantly less to house its homeless population than to bear the burden of jail and hospital costs. In both the Poverty Initiative and the 10-Year Plan, specific goals are set to establish housing units and/or housing trust funds to enable the construction of new affordable housing units. Should low-income housing be a priority for Nashville? If so, why? If you are elected mayor, what steps will you take to ensure that the goals set for the construction of low-income housing units in Nashville will be accomplished?

James Keeton: There is no excuse for not making a conscious effort to ensure good affordable housing. I believe the greatest challenge in a city the size of Nashville is to keep a rein on housing costs. There should be a wide range of prices, choices and rents. However, too often realtors and landlords are guilty of charging whatever the market will bear. This vicious cycle is not easily overcome. Everyone needs the security and comfort of a home, however great or humble it might be.

I am against building "warehouses" to house the homeless. When government builds low-income housing it tends to look like an institution (although that is changing) and be high-density. Unfortunately, private business often builds the same type of housing. If it’s going to be done, let’s put some thought into it and get it right. Warehouses are not the right way to do it. If government is involved in low-income housing, I believe it should work with and through faith-based organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and others.

Bruce Casper: Yes, low-income housing should be a priority. Being homeless myself, I think it should be. There’s going to be more people passing away because of weather conditions and all that. The only way it’s going to work, though, is if the homeless person wants the help—if they want the housing, if they’re willing to keep the housing. Some of the people I’ve come across, they say they want the housing, but they get in there—and some of them do want the housing, it’s just that once they get into the housing, they don’t know what to do, because they’ve been on the streets so long. They have to follow rules, pay bills, and so on. They’re not accustomed to it. Like me, if I were to become un-homeless, I’d have the same problem. But nobody knows what to do about this. Even me, I don’t know what to do about it.

The biggest thing, though, is to appoint a case manager to each homeless person for a couple months to help them get on their feet. Appoint a counselor who'd be able to help you pay your bills—not pay them for you, but help show you what to do and make sure you're getting everything done each month, just for a couple months, to make sure the transition's easy.

As far as housing, what I’d do is take some of these buildings around here that are abandoned and turn them into apartments. There's tons of buildings down here, especially in the downtown area, that could be turned into apartment buildings.

Marvin Barnes: Affordable housing trust funds could be a piece of the pie of solutions needed. I would request for those who can to instigate a fund through a minor increase in services—in more than one area, so as to not be a large increase in cost and burden on the public. Hopefully this can be done through a once-a-year cost on the public. These funds would be set aside for the betterment of housing for homeless families. I would use hotels that are not currently in use, which would be purchased using grant money. Indications are that a single hotel room used for this purpose might not accommodate a family, so I would propose using two hotel rooms, which would be done by cutting a door between two units in order to keep families together. After a period of time, families who are able would pay rent at a higher rate. Those increased amounts could then be applied to the housing trust fund.

The Contributor: In March of this year, a subcommittee (the Committee on Police/Homeless Issues) of the Metro Homelessness Commission presented its findings from a study that looked into the statistics of arrests of homeless individuals for so-called “quality of life” crimes in Nashville over the last five years. The results show that in all categories (public intoxication, obstruction of a passageway, trespassing, etc.) the number of arrests increased significantly. Some have argued that this increase is due in large part to the city’s “quality of life” campaign itself, and cannot accurately be attributed to an actual increase in lawlessness, that, rather, the laws have been applied disproportionately. What is your take on this debate? What is the role of the police department and what is the role of social service agencies in addressing homelessness in our city? What improvements, if any, might be made in this area? If you are elected mayor, what course of action do you plan to take to address these issues?

James Keeton: I have personally been subjected to some rather aggressive panhandling in downtown Nashville. If we want Nashville to be attractive to visitors, panhandling must be reasonably and strictly restricted. I believe the laws are not being applied unfairly but were probably not applied as strictly in the past. There should be a better way to address the issue besides tickets and proceedings.

There are places for people to stay for the night but for various reasons (housing capacity, facility rules, addictions and egos) many homeless will not avail themselves of these resources. They’d rather take their chances on the streets. Unfortunately, we tend to jail people instead of taking them to receive the proper care. Is there a way to help the homeless without the pressure of face-to-face confrontation? Will they accept that help or do they wish to continue to control their circumstances?

Bruce Casper: Seeing this from a first-hand experience out here on the streets, these quality-of-life ordinances that metro police department have been issuing are totally wrong. You have homeless people out here who open a bottle of beer and drink it. But then, on the other hand, you have tourists and the citizens of Nashville walking down the street with an open container and they don’t do nothing to them, just like walking through parking lots that say no trespassing or blocking the public sidewalk. Normal citizens and tourists do this on a daily basis, but if a homeless person or more than one homeless person do these things, they get cited for them. And that’s wrong. Plus, the biggest thing about trespassing for me is, if you’re in an area and you’re just trying to sleep, and you’re not bothering anybody, and you’re not trashing the area, you should not be getting a citation or going to jail for that. I can understand if it was drunken behavior or causing fights all night long. But me personally, I have gone to jail and I have received citations for trespassing, so I know what it’s like.

As for metro police department, they’re taking it too far. They’re out to get certain people. I can understand that there are people out there doing it on a daily basis. I can name numerous people out there who are getting drunk every day, and they’re throwing them into jail. There is no hope for those people—I’m serious, I know quite a few people out there who don’t want the help. I talked to one officer who said they need to put them in jail for longer periods of time to dry them out. That’s not going to happen. Because they’ve been drinking so long, you can’t just throw them in jail and expect them to dry out. As for social services, we have the services—Alcoholics Anonymous, stuff like that. It’s just, like I said before, they need to want the help. You can’t force somebody to get the help.

Marvin Barnes: It is a problem, and a cause of police being tied up with issues of a non-threatening nature. Resolving issues surrounding housing can only help, but ultimately, I’m not sure if these matters can be resolved by government intervention alone—without the help of the general public. Therefore, actions that I would take would include talking to churches and civic leaders for both their ideas and their help.

The Contributor: Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) has reported that more than 2,000 students in the MNPS system have been identified as homeless. The HERO Program was started to address this stark number. Other programs and non-profits in the city, few and far between, exist to address family homelessness, such as Safe Haven Family Shelter, which has room for only a handful of families at a time. If you are elected mayor, what concrete measures will you take to address the growing problem of child and family homelessness in our city?

James Keeton: I believe poverty and homelessness is a very real need for more programs for families who are homeless. Almost all of the existing programs are for men or women but not whole families together. I am not sure why this area of family homelessness has been neglected.

I believe that society is best served when families remain intact. Even in the instance of homelessness, it is everyone’s best interest to keep families together if at all possible. Some type of incentive should be available to faith-based or other non-profit groups to address this situation more fully. Support groups are essential to help address the necessary needs of the family as well as assist in transition while providing hope for the family. This area appears to be the most neglected.

Bruce Casper: We need more family shelters. At the Salvation Army you have to pay $10 a night to stay there. As far as the men’s and women’s missions—I don’t know about the women’s mission, but at the men’s mission, families aren’t allowed. We need a place for families where they can stay together, because if they’re broken apart by separate shelters, that’s just going to break up the family more. As for the school, as long as the child’s getting their education and getting what they need, they shouldn’t be treated any differently than any other kid.

Marvin Barnes: Number one, if these homeless children are without families, then I would enlist the community of Nashville as a whole in getting them headed down the right path. Mothers should never be separated from their children just because they are indigent. If the situation requires locating lost family members, then all means of effort need to be expended in searching for family members. I believe that there is a true need for homes for those children who have no one, and am willing to do whatever it takes, if elected, by signing into law any measures which will help to get these children off the street, and into a home or some other protected environment. Being without family or someone to inspire you only fans the fires of hopelessness.

The Contributor: What is your personal philosophy for addressing poverty and homelessness? What do you understand to be the causes of poverty and homelessness and what do you take to be the most effective ways of addressing poverty and homelessness? If elected mayor, how do you intend to make Nashville a leader in significantly reducing poverty and homelessness? Why are these things important at all? What signs of hope do you see thus far?

James Keeton: I believe poverty and homelessness is indicative of a broken world. The causes are as varied and as individual as is each person. More and more we live in a world where the minimal standard of living continues to increase and many cannot keep up. Some are homeless because of addictions. Many of us are two paychecks away from being homeless and all it would take is for one domino to fall.

My personal philosophy for addressing poverty and homelessness is that we cannot just ignore it. We must work on why it happens and what we as members of the community can do to keep it from happening. We should not make it difficult for people to overcome their addictions, get an education, learn a skill, earn a living and merge back into productivity. It’s easy to recommend a quick-fix solution and say, “there, we’ve done something.” It’s easier to spend money than...
“Mayoral Candidate Conversations” Continued from Page 16

to invest your own time and attention into individuals to help them turn their lives around. Yet there are people who have a calling to do just that.

There are no “throw away” people. I believe each person is made in the image of God and that everyone is redeemable.

I don’t see business or government taking the lead in reducing or eliminating poverty and homelessness because it’s always going to be about the bottom line. Eventually, they will resist keeping such programs going because it will cost too much. But individual and faith-based endeavors will go the extra mile regardless of the cost. They will invest in lives if they are allowed to do so by the politicians and pundits. Giving people hope is the beginning of the transformation. I don’t see a lot of hope when I look at government. But government can make it easier for those people and groups who do specialize in offering hope and a way back to some sense of normalcy.

I am reminded how the founders of the Salvation Army worked together to help those who were in need. While William Booth preached to the poor in less than ideal circumstances, his wife Catherine spoke to the wealthy in their affluent churches, pleading for donations for their work. Similarly, those in our society who are in need continue to need advocates to plead their situations to the movers and shakers in our city. If individuals have the resources to help, we should not ignore those in need. Perhaps a “clash of civilizations” is what is needed to jolt us out of our complacency. Sadly, we will spend obscene amounts of money on economic development and advertising but very little to help those in need.

Bruce Casper: What signs of hope have I seen so far? Nothing, because Mayor Karl Dean has done nothing. He’s just telling metro police department there is zero tolerance for homeless people in Nashville. I have been told that by a cop at 3:00 o’clock in the morning: there is zero tolerance for homelessness. As for the homeless issue itself. Homelessness has always been—as far back as when God created earth. Adam and Eve were homeless. Jesus was homeless. That’s what people don’t understand: homelessness has been around forever. And like I said, the only way to end homelessness is if the homeless person wants the help. When I first announced I was running for mayor, I told some homeless people about it. And they didn’t say do this or do that, they just said, “Please help us?” And I said, “How am I supposed to help you?” And what I’ve come to realize over the last three months is, there are certain people who don’t want help—they don’t want a hand up, they want a handout. The reason I’m running for mayor, though, is that the generalization of homelessness in the public is wrong. We’re all considered bums, and other things that are unnamable. I was in a store the other day, during Fan Fair, and I was in line when a [homeless] guy came in and asked if he could exchange his can of Pepsi for a can of Sprite. They told him they didn’t have that in a Sprite. They used Emma. They used Emma.

What signs of hope have I seen in the city of Nashville? I have been told that by a cop at 3:00 o’clock in the morning: there is zero tolerance for homelessness. But I would like to say that I’m not saying all those people are dumb—which I’m not saying! Don’t quote me on that! Yes, there are people out here on the streets who are working. And you don’t see them out here every day, except for the ones who are selling the paper.

Even metro police department, on the whole, has generalized homelessness as bums and street urchins and everything else. We’re not all like that. Some of us do not want to be on the streets. It’s just that if we were off the streets, and in a place, we wouldn’t know what to do with ourselves. Especially when you have close-knit contact with a whole bunch of people and then you’re thrown into a place by yourself—I’ve done that and I’ve gone crazy, basically. I hate being alone when I’m in a place. But, when I’m on the streets, I’d rather be alone than around a lot of people. So it’s like a no-win solution!

The only solution I see is, it relies on the homeless person himself. If they want the help, that’s the only way you’ll end homelessness.

Marvin Barnes: My personal philosophy is that if someone truly needs help then they need to be helped. I do believe there are those who will not accept or want help. I also believe that people should be willing to work, for if they are unwilling to bear some kind of burden, then they become a burden on society. As JFK said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

Poverty and homelessness are always going to exist somewhere, but the simple truth of the matter is, people need more than monetary support. They first need the will to get out of these terrible conditions, or else all the help in the world comes to naught. Helping people to have the will to act is the only way you can address this problem. This can only happen by treating them for who they are human beings. They are somebody, and they have just as much potential, or just as much hope, as anyone else. But some are unable to see it. Helping them see the whole picture is part of the key, and growing the will to act is the second part of the key. These things are important because without them no one can remove themselves from this downward spiral of depression and hopelessness.

There are many avenues of hope, and some have nothing to do with poverty and homelessness. For instance, there are stores that offer used clothing at a price that can help those in poverty. Many also offer help by giving clothing to those in need, for instance, Clara’s Closet. Others are in the business of helping with problems that exist in the mind. Churches in the area probably offer as much to these individuals as anyone can, but many of those who are so far gone down the road of hopelessness have truly become lost inside themselves.

I have often said, the fastest runner has never run a race, and the fastest swimmer has never been in the water. No one can know if they can succeed at something if they never try.