

# The Times-Picayune

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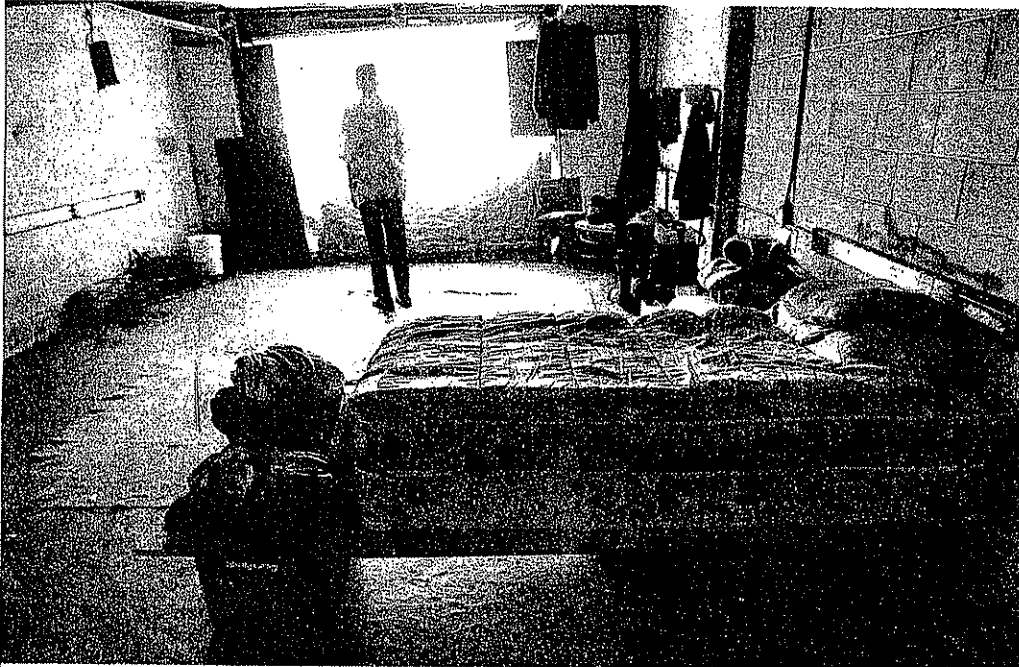
NEW ORLEANS EI



Jimmy Green Jr., 70, is the self-proclaimed boss of a building of squatters.

## NOWHERE TO TURN

*Homeless advocates say more and more elderly New Orleanians, faced with few options, are holing up in abandoned buildings*



PHOTOS BY DAVID GRUNFELD / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

John Bailey lives with 11 other elderly people in an abandoned building that was once a truck garage in Central City. Caseworkers for the homeless say the settlement illustrates a trend: a growing number of people in their 70s and 80s who live in blighted buildings.

By **Katy Reckdahl** Staff writer

**J**immy Green Jr., 70, has lived in an abandoned building since long before what he calls "the first storm": Hurricane Katrina.

He now lives inside a makeshift cinder block dorm that he and 11 other elderly people created in a former Central City truck garage on the corner of Thalia and South

Saratoga streets. He totes water from a nearby fire station. His quilts and a distinctive red stocking cap keep him cozy during cold snaps.

Green, a former produce vendor at the French Market, doesn't complain. As his mother, Mary Green, told him, "Wherever you lay your head is home." But not long ago, Green got so sick with

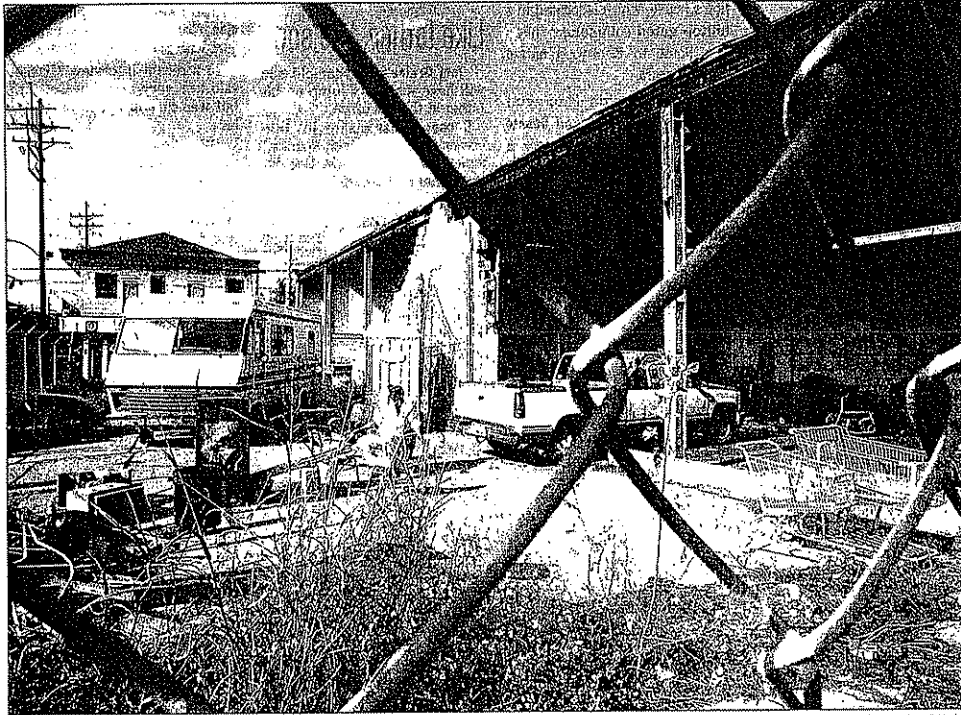
pneumonia that he fought for every breath.

His friends the firefighters saved his life with their oxygen tank, he said. The scare made him yearn for a place out of the frigid night air, without rats or gaping holes plugged by wilted newspaper.

On a recent chilly night, caseworkers from the nonprofit

See **HOMELESS**, A-15

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DAVID GRUNFELD / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

Jimmy Green Jr., 70, lives at an abandoned building in Central City. Not long ago, Green got so sick with pneumonia that he fought for every breath. His friends from a nearby fire station saved his life with their oxygen tank, he said.

## Many squatters suffering from illnesses

### HOMELESS, from A-1

homeless advocacy group UNITY of Greater New Orleans visited the Central City lair, which lacks running water and utilities. Inside was Porter Powell, 90, the oldest squatter the caseworkers have found so far. But they say the settlement illustrates a trend: a growing numbers of people in their 70s and 80s who live inside blighted buildings.

Unable to afford rent on fixed or nonexistent incomes, the garage's residents carved out a crude home inside a neighborhood they know. But the group is in poor health: Among their problems are liver and kidney disease, heart problems, paranoia, schizophrenia, HIV and AIDS, and dementia, said UNITY head Martha Kegel, who said donations of furniture and houseware are desperately needed to properly outfit Green and some of the other estimated 400 homeless people UNITY has housed this year with the help of federal rental assistance.



DAVID GRUNFELD / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

John Bailey is silhouetted against the blue tarp that he and other squatters use to keep the wind and the rain out of the abandoned cinder block building where they stay in Central City.

For the homeless, fire is an ever-present threat, Green said. Flames from candles and heating fires badly scarred Green's right leg a few years ago and have disfigured nearly every building in this part of Central City, including Myrtle Banks Elementary School, where blackened bricks are the result of a recent four-alarm blaze.

Green lived in other buildings before he moved into the garage, where he is the self-proclaimed boss.

He raised his cane to wave at James Andrews Sr., 57, a former co-worker from the market who often rides his bicycle past the garage. Once Green's mother and sister died, he had no family to take him in, said Andrews, who has lived with his daughter since Katrina's winds ruined his apartment building.

Andrews considers himself blessed. Some homeless people his age have children in town but simply cannot lean on them now.

"Times are too tough for everyone," Andrews said.

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