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## YOUR OPINIONS

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### Together, community is helping the homeless

Re: "N.O. homeless plan changes direction," Feb. 21.

Our community can make significant progress in reducing homelessness if we persevere in what has been proven across the nation to be most effective. New Orleans already has a stunning success story.

Since Thanksgiving, our community has rehoused over 225 residents of the Duncan Plaza homeless camp in permanent apartments. To our knowledge, no other city has ever housed that many street homeless people in so short a time.

The credit goes to the generous people of New Orleans, including landlords, nonprofits, churches and faith groups, businesses, philanthropies, private citizens, and public servants in

city, state and federal government.

The scarcity of affordable housing and mental health services is fueling New Orleans' crisis of homelessness. As we work toward an effective strategy to address the Claiborne Bridge homeless camp and the problem of people living in abandoned buildings and on the streets elsewhere in the city, the continuing partnership between city government and UNITY of Greater New Orleans is essential.

Also essential is the New Orleans Mission, one of our member agencies, which provides a critical part of the social safety net.

The strategy for the Claiborne camp must address the fact that most of its residents have mental or physical disabilities. Many

disabled people will not go to emergency shelter, cannot sleep with dozens of people in an enclosed room or cannot comply with shelter rules.

The good news: The state already has significant supportive housing resources that can rehouse disabled Claiborne residents – a proven cost-effective solution.

Most of the Claiborne residents lived in the New Orleans area before Katrina. They wanted to come home, even though they have no home. We resolve to keep working in partnership with the entire community until the most vulnerable of our neighbors again has a home.

**Martha J. Kegel**  
Executive Director  
UNITY of Greater New Orleans  
New Orleans

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2/28/08 T-P