



# THE MAD HOUSERS

499 Moreland Ave, Suite 002, Atlanta, GA 30307. ph: 404.806.6233 fax: 404.523.3862 info@madhousers.org

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**May 3-4, Saturday/Sunday**  
**Athens Human Rights Festival**  
Downtown Athens, GA

**May 6, Tuesday 7:00pm**  
**Fundraising/PR Meeting**  
t-QED Office (449 Moreland)

**May 7, Wednesday 7:00pm**  
**Site Recon Planning**  
Jake's Ice Cream (676 N. Highland)

**May 11, Sunday 10:00am**  
**Site Recon**  
Warehouse (538 Permalume Place)

**May 15, Thursday 7:00pm**  
**General Meeting**  
Jake's Ice Cream (676 N. Highland)

**May 21, Wednesday 7:00pm**  
**Panel Build**  
Warehouse (538 Permalume Place)

**May 25, Sunday 10:00am**  
**Soup to Nuts Hut Build**  
Warehouse (538 Permalume Place)

**June 4, Wednesday 7:00pm**  
**Panel Build**  
Warehouse (538 Permalume Place)

**June 8, Sunday 10:00am**  
**Hut Build**  
Warehouse (538 Permalume Place)

**June 10, Tuesday 7:00pm**  
**Fundraising/PR Meeting**  
t-QED Office (449 Moreland)

**June 18, Wednesday 7:00pm**  
**Panel Build**  
Warehouse (538 Permalume Place)

**June 19, Thursday 7:00pm**  
**General Meeting**  
Jake's Ice Cream (676 N. Highland)

**June 22, Sunday 10:00am**  
**Hut Repair & Replacement**  
Warehouse (538 Permalume Place)

## HOWDY FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

This year has already gotten off to a roaring start. Thanks to a surge in donations at the end of last year and some careful planning by our members, The Mad Housers started the new year well capitalized and ready to combat homelessness through the use of innovative sheltering and supportive technologies.

Fiscal year 2002 was a great year of re-birth for our organization. At the beginning of last year, we were homeless (no warehouse), disorganized (no clearly defined goals), poor (no fundraising strategies), and small (a core group of about five or six people).

Fortunately, one thing we did have was a crazy mission in which we all fervently believed. Even if it wasn't always clearly articulated, we all knew in our hearts that it was just wrong for people to live without adequate shelter in one of the wealthiest nations in the world.

So we sat down and set some modest goals for the year. We wanted to build ten shelters (less than one a month!) and find a new warehouse. We also wanted to raise enough money to cover these costs and do a little research.

The amazing part about goals is that once you define them, they have a habit of becoming reality! We built all ten shelters, had a great space donated to us by the Furniture Bank of Atlanta (<http://www.furniturebankatlanta.org>) recruited a host of highly motivated volunteers, and started the new year with enough cash in the bank to take us well past the first quarter!

With that success fresh in our minds, we decided to try setting a few goals for this year and to more clearly articulate our mission. Consulting our new recruits and drawing upon our past experience, we decided to shoot for the following:

### Implementation

- Build 18 new shelters
- Maintain 24 aging shelters
- Manufacture 25 new stoves

### Research

- Design a low profile shelter
- Build a new and improved Gencar
- Experiment with low-cost lighting

### Education/Outreach

- Increase amount of documentation
- Stage four awareness events
- Arrange two national media articles
- Partner with new organizations to support our clients
- Define one new population for whom to develop services

With our entirely volunteer staff and frugal construction methods, the price tag for all of this is just under \$20,000! Our administrative costs are almost non-existent, so almost all of our donations get pumped right into research, implementation, or outreach.

Thank you for being interested in our mission! We are looking forward to another successful year of researching, implementing, and documenting technologies to help eliminate homelessness.

Best wishes from The Board.

### The Mad Housers Newsletter

Volume 1, Number 2, Spring 2003

**Editor** Kurt Haas

**Layout** PJ Gallagher

**Contributors** Frank Jeffers, Kurt Haas, Salma Abdulrahman, Larise Jackson

### Board of Directors

President, Frank Jeffers

Vice-President, Nick Hess

Secretary, Kurt Haas

Treasurer, Salma Abdulrahman

William Barton

William Callison

Marvin Meyers

Sausan Ziony

## HUTTER PROFILE: JOE A.

My name is Joe. I am an 'Ordinary Joe', not a 'Joe Millionaire'. This is my story, which is far from ordinary.

A number of years ago I traveled from my native country to study Chemical Engineering at the University of Michigan. While I was studying for my degree a military coup occurred back home and my grant from the government was lost. I was forced to quit my studies due to financial hardship. My dreams were put on hold, but not lost.

Some time later I moved to Atlanta and was happily living in a long-term relationship. Unfortunately, the relationship ended abruptly and I found myself homeless and living on the streets of Atlanta without a single thought of where to go and how to get started again.

Life was hard, but I knew that things would get better. A person spotted me living amidst a thicket of trees and befriended me. He told me that he lived in huts provided by an organization called Mad Housers and invited me to come and stay in one of the huts.

Life definitely got better. I now had a permanent shelter from the elements and a secure base from which I could venture out to find work each day, confident that my belongings would be safe while I was gone.

I live in the camp with approximately nine other men and one woman. I outfitted my hut with a twin-sized bed and a few crates for storage.

Life in the camp can be quite a chore. I must think of ways of surviving with the bare essentials that most people normally take for granted, including water, electricity, cooking, and heating.

For example, I must start to prepare for the winter months by September by making charcoal to burn in the small stove the Mad Housers provide each year. In order to make the charcoal, I must have a supply of wood, an axe and a saw. Finding the constant supply of wood for heating and cooking can prove to be the most difficult task, although a generous tree man delivers wood to the camp sometimes. The job of making the charcoal is not an easy job, but a necessary one in order to remain warm, especially when the temperatures fall below freezing.

During the summer months, I plant a vegetable garden in the land adjoining it and share the produce with my fellow dwellers in the camp. Growing fresh vegetables is something I enjoy with a passion, although during the hot summer supplying water to the garden becomes even more difficult than staying warm in the winter. I would like to develop a way of collecting and storing the rain water as it runs off the roof

of my home, providing a more self-sufficient water supply and enabling my garden to be more productive.

With time I would like to expand the size of my dwelling; currently, the twin bed takes up about half of the space. I would like to also improve the lighting conditions in my hut, especially during the winter months when there are fewer daylight hours. Currently I use candles and electricity from a car battery. The battery must be charged fully once a week, which can be a major task in itself.

I am an avid reader and have acquired a considerable collection of hand me down books. My house is my sanctuary; it gives me more peace than most have and a sense of belonging. Each day I count my blessings and thank God for what he has given me. My hut is my home.

I will always reflect on the words of the inscription at the base of the Statue of Liberty written by Emma Lazarus. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free... Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the Golden door."

— Larise Jackson.

Note: Hutter Profiles are written with the complete knowledge and consent of the clients they represent. The completed article is presented to the client for approval before being published.

## ABOUT THE MAD HOUSERS...

**Our Vision** is a world in which everyone, regardless of background or situation, has adequate shelter that provides safety, stability, and privacy.

**Our Mission** is to research, implement, and document effective housing strategies and technologies.

### Our Objectives

- Research: To accumulate knowledge, techniques, and expertise pertaining to shelter and other basic living needs.
- Implementation: To design, construct, and distribute shelters and supportive infrastructure.
- Documentation: To publish and distribute our accumulated knowledge and experience to empower individuals and

organizations interested in shelter and housing.

Mad Housers Inc. is an all-volunteer organization working to create alternative housing options for homeless and under-housed populations. Our core belief is that it is difficult to achieve self-sufficiency without the basic foundation of a stable and secure living environment.

The Mad Housers started in the 1980's as an informal network of Georgia Tech architecture students. Seeing the improvised shelters erected by Atlanta's homeless, they felt they could design structures that were safer and more secure. An army of hammer-wielding volunteers began building and distributing small emergency

shelters around the city, incorporating as a nonprofit in 1988.

Affectionately referred to as "huts," our sturdy structures measure 6' wide, 8' deep, and 10' tall. Each hut has a gabled roof, a sleeping loft, a locking door, and a wood-burning stove.

Using a panelized construction method, the hut components are easily built and stored at our warehouse and then transported for assembly at a remote site.

The huts are not intended to be permanent housing; they are emergency shelters that offer privacy, security, stability, and protection from the elements.

# TECHNOLOGY REVIEW: CHARCOAL STOVES AND HEATING

## Why Charcoal?

The Mad Housers centered stove design efforts around charcoal ten years ago because it was the most readily available fuel to supply emergency heat to our hut sites. Most fossil fuels are too expensive and difficult for our clients to transport, and electricity is either unavailable or too costly for efficient heating.

The use and production of charcoal is easy to document and teach. For a person living outside the mainstream economy and with limited available currency, creating charcoal is an economically viable method for providing heat. If the cost of charcoal is compared to that of fossil fuels, the value of the charcoal a person could produce in one hour easily matches the money earned in a minimum wage job during the same period. This provides an opportunity to generate real economic value in the absence of adequate employment.

## Stove/Heating Technologies

Over the years, the Mad Housers have observed and tried many techniques for cooking and heating, each of which had different drawbacks and efficiencies. A properly made tepee fire will radiate a great deal of heat and burn almost smokeless. Most people will try to build

a campfire in a hole, but this is the wrong strategy. The wood burns more efficiently if you build it around a little hill of dirt so it can more effectively draw in air for combustion.

We've seen the old-timers (some remembered what it was like to be black during the great depression!), build a very efficient drum stove called a "rocket stove." It burned long sticks of wood that are easy to haul and don't need cutting to stove length. These stoves burned with such high combustion efficiency that they were nearly smokeless. The design required very little fuel and threw good radiant heat. In Central America and Mexico this combustion arrangement is now used in masonry stoves that approach the convenience and cleanliness of modern gas ranges while operating on locally available firewood. A search engine will bring up many sites dealing with this kind of stove under the names Rocket Stove, Justa stove, etc.

We've seen two different variations on fire-barrels: one for cooking, which produces some charcoal as a byproduct (Figure 1), and the other optimized completely for charcoal production (Figure 3). If operated properly, both types can be made to operate with little smoke and air pollution.

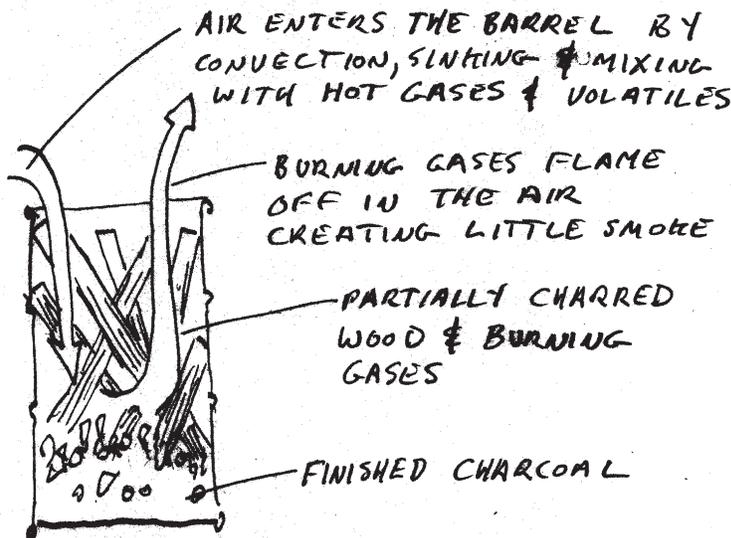


Figure 1. Charcoal production using a fire barrel that also allows cooking.

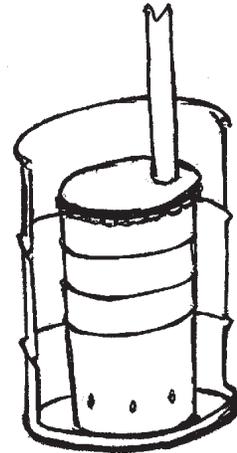


Figure 2. A Mad Housers heating stove complete with exhaust pipe and radiant head shield to reflect heat back into the hut.

## Fuel Choices

The most difficult problem was safely heating a space so that a person could get a good night's sleep in a warm place, even on the coldest and rainiest nights. This required a heater that could run reliably for eight or ten hours without attention.

Frank Jeffers, a Mad Housers organizer and chief engineer, reviewed the options listed in engineering handbooks and catalogs and found that fuels other than wood charcoal lacking one way or another. They were either unobtainable by homeless people, too expensive, required expensive equipment to burn, or had safety problems.

Some Fuels Considered: Abandoned tires are available all over Atlanta in vast quantity, but burning them creates dense clouds of black smoke. Newspapers are a disposal nuisance and don't burn well. Vegetable oils available in grocery stores fouled lamp wicks. Other liquid fuels carried the danger of accidents or arson and required quite a bit of money. At least the vegetable oils could be purchased with food stamps.

Putting responsibility for the spread of AIDS on homeless people, social agencies were pressing large quantities

of prophylactics on them at every opportunity. Some suggested we devise a stove that burned prophylactics. This seemed like a messy solution at best.

We needed a fuel that homeless people could obtain for themselves even in an urban environment. It needed to be independent of unemployment (an unstable variable for many homeless people) and independent of social agencies ignorant of heating matters and subject to capricious dictates of government. Charcoal could be made from almost any kind of waste wood, landscape waste, pallets, old furniture, tree surgeons waste, and so on, and would be there for anybody regardless of cash flow.

### Stove Requirements

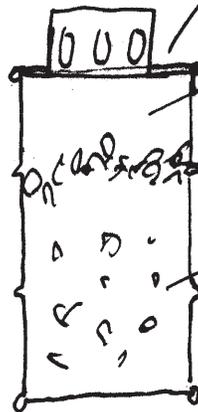
We had to size our heater to burn in a day the amount of fuel a person could be expected to scrounge in a day. Then to heat a space adequately, we had to design a space that could be adequately heated given the output of the stove.

For a shelter to be efficiently heated, air flow through it would have to be limited and controlled or we would primarily be heating the outdoors. Hardly any available heating devices had provision for venting combustion products to the outdoors, meaning the combustion products would have to be breathed by whomever they were warming. Given the mental disability or possible intoxication of many homeless, the chances of suffocating somebody were too high to risk the commercially available and affordable stoves.

Our heating device would have to have a chimney to vent combustion exhaust, something not available on any commercial product costing less than \$1000 dollars. Similarly, to obtain reliable, steady output for eight or ten hours, we'd have to go to automated pellet stoves that required electricity for their operation and would again cost on the order of \$1000. To get relatively smokeless operation, we would have to go to catalytic wood stove, once again costing about \$1000.

### Constructing the Ideal Stove

TIGHT FITTING TOP PUT ON BARREL CLAMPED INTO PLACE OR WEIGHTED



WITHOUT OXYGEN, BURNING CEASES

CHARCOAL COOLS TIL IT CAN BE HANDLED WITHOUT RE-IGNITING

Figure 3. Charcoal production using the charcoal optimized fire barrel.

Unable to find anything on the market remotely like what we required, Mad Housers cast about to see what could be built from scratch: a vented stove, burning five pounds of wood coals a night, and costing so little it would be disposable in a high risk environment. A decision was made to try using materials manufactured for other purposes that could be adapted for a stove. Hopefully the job could get done for low cost with simple hand tools and relatively unskilled labor.

After some experimentation, the most like candidate appeared to be the simple steel shop buckets that paint and other materials are shipped in. Several buckets were combined into a simple stove design, which was filled with charcoal and lit. The results were encouraging: it worked well, and using an inexpensive 2-inch diameter electrical conduit proved sufficient to provide draft and exhaust vent for the fire.

Thirty dollars, a Skillsaw, a 3/8 inch electric drill, and we were there!

### Refining the Mad Housers Stove

There have been further developments. The stove has about doubled in size in the last ten years. It now can accept a length of un-split stove wood along with the charcoal for burns up to 24 hours. A radiant shield to recover heat that would be wasted has improved

efficiency. (Figure 2) We have dramatically improved the effectiveness and cleanliness of our charcoal production methods using suggestions from our technical advisor from Africa. The addition of insulation has made huts more heatable – in fact we've had to stop insulating the walls because it was getting TOO hot! The stove has grown in capability and can now successfully heat one of our two story 10 x 10 mountain cabins all night long.

We've recently started considering designs that could efficiently heat a trailer or small house. Unfortunately, this brings us into direct competition with the home heating and oil industry. Hopefully this will not result in any preemptive strikes...

— Frank Jeffers



Volunteers construct a hut in memory of artist Gretchin Cummins Hefpful, a volunteer who passed away last year.

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE: SALMA

I've been a Mad Houser for about a year and a half now. I moved to Atlanta two years ago from Knoxville, where I was studying Computer Science at the University of Tennessee. When I moved here I really wanted to join a volunteer organization and help out in the community.

Then I saw a small ad about the Mad Housers in Creative Loafing. Nick Hess was trying to gather enough volunteers to get the group up and running again. I thought to myself, "I'll go to the build and try it out, and if they turn out to be a bunch of weirdos, I'll just leave."

But that first build turned out great! The volunteers who showed up were \*SO\* cool—and they were just like me: excited about helping the homeless. It

was early November, and we spent a beautiful morning in Nick's front yard, assembling panels. After lunch we loaded up the panels and took them to the hut site where we saw assembled huts for the first time and got to meet some of the clients. By the end of the afternoon we had built a sturdy shelter, and a homeless man now had a roof over his head. It all gave me the most incredible feeling of accomplishment—I knew I had finally found what I was looking for.

The longer I spend with the Mad Housers, the more I find myself being drawn to its cause. On top of volunteering to build huts, I'm also the Treasurer and I sit on the Board of Directors. In addition to working with the Mad Housers, I teach adult basic literacy for the Literacy Volunteers of America.



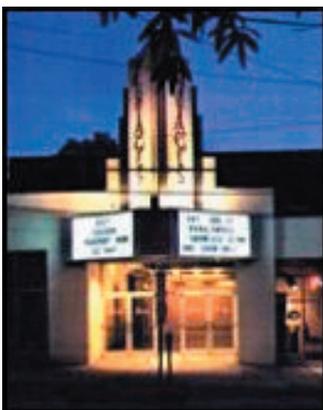
Many people think I do all this volunteer work for religious reasons. But my being Muslim really has nothing to do with it. It's just part of my nature—I love helping other people. I firmly believe that one day it will come back to me. When I'm in trouble, someone will give me a helping hand.

— Salma Abdulrahman

## ALIVE IN LITTLE FIVE!

The Mad Housers took to the stage Saturday night! On April 5th at 11:00pm, Tim Cordier hosted the Mad Housers on his late night talk show "Alive in Little Five". The event took place at 7 Stages Theatre in the bohemian Little 5 Points neighborhood of Atlanta.

The night started out at a hectic pace. Mad Housers volunteers met at the theatre at 10:30pm to get a head start on assembling the hut. The panels were pre-assembled, painted, and ready to



7 Stages Theatre, the site of the Mad Housers "Alive in Little Five" event.

go after a test build at the warehouse the previous Wednesday. Getting the panels into the theatre was no small feat. At one point a stage door had to be taken off its hinges and removed because the panels were too large to get through. The hut was put together using screws instead of nails to speed up the process and reduce noise. One roof panel was left off to give the audience a clear view of the inside of the hut, including the loft and the stovepipe.

In just 15 minutes, the hard-working volunteers had the bright yellow and purple demo hut completed. Clay and Nick were just fitting the stovepipe through the roof as the first members of the audience trickled in. They stared at the ten and a half foot tall structure curiously, wondering what zany skit it would be used for.

Tim invited Mad Housers volunteers Nick Hess and Salma Abdulrahman onto the stage to talk about the group. Nick described the history of the Mad Housers, the details of hut construction, and the kinds of people The Mad Housers tries to help. When asked if the Mad

Housers organization was only "enabling" the homeless the problem, Nick replied "yes, we're totally enabling the problem. If allowing homeless people to continue to live with some dignity and function on their own is a problem, then yes." At one point, Nick even picked up some juggling balls off Tim's desk and juggled and sang his way through an impromptu performance of "Bourgeois Blues" by Lead Belly. Other guests included Cathy Woolard (Atlanta City Council President) and Stevens and Ronnog Seaberg of Seaberg Acrobatic Poetry.

The audience left that night with a new appreciation for the plight of the homeless and a glimpse of what the Mad Housers does to help them. As people streamed down the steps and headed for the exits, many stopped to ask questions and examine the hut, knocking on the walls and exploring the inside. Thanks to the tremendous work of our dedicated volunteers, our hut performance was a huge success.

— Salma Abdulrahman

# MAYOR'S COMMISSION ON THE HOMELESS

The results are in from Shirley Franklin's Commission on Homelessness. The Commission, formed on November 1st of last year, was lead by the United Way and was charged with analyzing homelessness in Atlanta and reporting their findings and a set of specific recommendations back to the city government. Key points and proposals include:

- A one-stop service center to provide all services in one building.
- A building to be renovated to rent to non-profits that might serve the homeless with medical and job assistance.
- The report estimates the homeless population in Atlanta in 2001 at 12,000, and that 2267 homeless found space in shelters this past Jan. 23, one of the coldest days this year.
- Recommends a regional authority to represent Atlanta, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton, and Gwinnett counties.
- Increase funds to provide emergency financial assistance for rent, mortgage, and utilities.
- Try to re-unite homeless with their families outside the region.
- Establish a 24/7 youth crisis center.
- Have the mayor publicly assert that homelessness is not a crime.
- Recruit hotels to find rooms for homeless families when all other emergency family shelters are full.
- Endorse the Shelter-a-Family program, which matches families from shelters with congregations to house and mentor them until they are self-sufficient.
- Find a suitable site for a building that could offer 50 rooms to house mentally ill and addicted homeless.
- Provide public toilets in busy commercial areas as soon as possible.
- Coordinate with government agencies to make sure homeless people are getting benefits and social services they are entitled.
- Hold a regional summit on homelessness.

## SOME INTERESTING WEBSITES

The Mayor's Press release:  
[www.ci.atlanta.ga.us/homepagePressReases/homelessness3.htm](http://www.ci.atlanta.ga.us/homepagePressReases/homelessness3.htm)

Detailed findings of the Mayor's Commission on Homelessness:  
[www.unitedwayatlanta.org/homeless/welcome.html](http://www.unitedwayatlanta.org/homeless/welcome.html)

HUD Data and Reports:  
[www.huduser.org](http://www.huduser.org)

## DID YOU KNOW?

"Atlanta, New York and San Francisco are the cities that are most unfriendly to the homeless."

The report by two Washington-based advocacy groups for the homeless—the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty—says Atlanta "continues to treat its homeless people as criminals." quoted by Ernie Suggs and Jill Young Miller in an AJC article, Thursday, January 17, 2002

## DONATION FORM.

- Basic Donation \$20
- Maintain a hut for a Year \$50
- Help fund our research \$100
- Build a new 6'x8' hut \$400  
(one person)
- Build a new 8'x8' hut \$700  
(couple)
- Build a new 10'x10' hut \$1,500  
(small family)
- Any amount you'd like \_\_\_\_\_
- I have materials to donate (lumber, paint, tools, roll roofing, etc.)
- I am interested in volunteering.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, & Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number  Please Call Me

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address  Please add me to your email list

Mad Housers, Inc. is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization. You may send your tax deductible contribution to:

Mad Housers Inc., 449 Moreland Ave, Suite 002, Atlanta, GA 30307.