

HOSTILE ARCHITECTURE:

The 'Innovative' Way to Avoid Those Living on the Streets

BY JACK GILLIN

It's a scorching summer's day in Fort Lauderdale at the Salvation Army food drive. Howard Hass, like many other people, are lining up to receive bags of goods that they cannot obtain on their own. He walks up to the shaded tables, gratefully accepts plastic bags of food and hangs them over the handlebars of his bike. Hass spent years on the streets, trekking through the heat tirelessly for hours. He constantly ran the risk of having his scarce belongings stolen, or being attacked. Cars would pass him by and he wondered if they even saw him. If passers-by said anything to him, it would commonly be a judgmental remark, like, 'Get a job,' or call him something rude. He still finds it odd when people say that, because he knows how fast it can happen, how fast you can lose your home and all the things you've worked for. "It can happen to anyone, overnight," he says.

Hass, along with countless other homeless

individuals, have shared the trauma of not having somewhere to sleep. Despite over half a million Americans being homeless, they continue to be looked over and mistreated. Public resources such as benches have slowly been taken from them, eliminating yet another place to sleep. When you stumble across a bench that has railings sectioning it, you are seeing an example of hostile architecture. Hostile architecture describes when a public amenity is built with a clear and brutal display of what you should and should not be doing. Common examples of this are walls lined with spikes, benches interrupted by railings or other elements that disrupt lying down. Despite the intentions of such building methods, it's being overused to discourage homeless people from sleeping and residing in public areas. Nowadays, it's hard to find a bench that isn't interrupted by railings or spikes. Hostile architecture has not only become widespread, it's becoming accepted.

In shopping plazas, it's common to see signs near

benches that indicate the rules of the space. A usual rule in these areas is one person must only take up one seat at a time. "You can imagine, they're not likely to come and enforce that against someone who's got a Macy's bag, but when someone has their whole life, then they're going to come out and enforce that," says Jon Ritter, an architectural historian and clinical associate professor at New York University. However, when you're trying to push away a group of people, you might exclude another in turn. "My father is 87 years old, and when he's walking down the street, he's looking for a place to sit down," Ritter says. More times than not, his father is unable to find a place to sit because of the elimination of benches in his area. "When you take that away, you're not only making it unwelcoming for the homeless, but a whole host of people who have different kinds of needs and uses," Ritter says.

Walking through the halls of the Salvation Army, David Hayton, the director of development, passes

by the respite room. He sees the crowd of people enjoying the rustic western movie playing on the TV. One of them lets out a sigh. The weather outside is brutal and this cooling atmosphere gives unhoused people a relaxing break from the streets. Hayton makes his way to a long hall where the sun shines in from the tall windows on the north side. Thirty-eight cots are lined up against the walls. This room serves as a sleeping area for anyone who claims it before night. People start to line up to get a bed hours before it's open. It's hard for the Salvation Army to turn people away, but being at full capacity, there isn't much more they can do for the countless people lining up at their doors.

Theophilus Rachel is a man who was faced with misfortune. He says he was kicked out of his apartment for taking in friends frequently when they needed help. This pushed him out onto the streets, where he lived for six months. Rachel's helping nature left him with frustration and a new

Theophilus Rachel looks back on his past on the streets and everything he's been through. His strong mind and positive nature continue to grow, as he's glad to be at the Salvation Army's food drive.



PHOTO CREDIT: MENA ZAVALA



The respite room. A classic western movie playing on the TV, a pair of people playing cards to the side, the AC is like a paradise away from the heat.



This long hall has 38 cots lined up on the walls. It serves as a place for individuals to sleep. It's common for crowds to line up as early as 6 p.m., to claim a bed for the night.

PHOTO CREDIT: MENA ZAVALA

world of challenges. "Is it wrong to help people out?" he asks, sitting in a waiting room at the Salvation Army. He never rejected someone in need. "When people came to my house, I helped everyone, because I didn't know which one would be God," Rachel said. He faced obstacles every day on the streets, including where he would sleep. When he was met with hostile architecture, Rachel would contort his body and bend around the railings on benches to try to find comfort. His secondary choice would be to sleep on the ground. Thinking back to the time he spent homeless, he says it "seemed like a dream," it didn't feel real to him. He has since moved back into an apartment, but his time on the streets will always leave a mark on him. With the assistance of the Salvation Army, Rachel has had help finding his way.

Lilly Gallardo works as the director of programs at the Salvation Army to help people reach a better place in life. The Salvation Army provides housing and care for people living on the streets. "We are the bridge between what they need and what they have," Gallardo says. Usually, someone's hope for their job is that they can continue to do what they do, but she shares, "The goal is to have the shelter empty!" She expresses that there should be no need for a job like hers, and everyone deserves housing. The Salvation Army hosts food drives and other events to assist those in need. During a food drive, they clear out their pantry and give whatever food they have to people in need. While working with the homeless population, Gallardo has learned so much and sees flaws in what people assume. Gallardo believes that there is so much more to a person than their living state. She feels compassion for unhoused individuals and sees them for the people they are, people who were dealt a bad hand.

When Gallardo first started working with the

Salvation Army, she strictly followed the protocols and processes for every person coming into their care. One family came to her for help, a mother with two children. She told the mother that the first step was for her to find a job, so Gallardo sent her off to job hunt. Later that day, Gallardo was in her car and drove past a sidewalk with an intriguing sight: She saw the mother and her children, sitting hunched over on a curb. Looking at this woman and her kids, she noticed the ridiculousness within her words. How was she supposed to find a job with children by her side? "Seeing her on the sidewalk ... it was a sight I'll never forget," Gallardo says. Since then, the care of the Salvation Army has changed, treating each person as an individual, helping them in a more holistic way. Gallardo has a new-found compassion and determination to

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help the homeless population.

Howard Hass was met with many hardships during his years on the streets. He witnessed five people lose their lives, went without sleep for what seemed like ages and faced challenges every day. He expresses how the streets are unforgiving to people with addiction, as he, himself, has battled with alcohol. Luckily, being in housing now, he is working on his sobriety. Now that he finally has a stable place to stay, daily life isn't as much of a burden or challenge. "I'm not giving it up for

nothing," Hass says of living in a home. When he comes across a person on the streets, he always helps when he can, giving spare change.

"There shouldn't even be a situation where someone needs to sleep on a bench," Lilly Gallardo shares. The rise of hostile architecture is causing more people to seek shelter from the Salvation Army, and there's only so much the organization can do at full capacity. The team of staff works around the clock and never has a typical day at work. There are always daily challenges that come up. The recent law that went into effect in Florida, HB 1365, puts the homeless population in even more danger. The law, titled the "Unauthorized Public Camping and Public Sleeping," prohibits individuals from sleeping and camping in public areas. Many people feel, if someone is not able to sleep under a roof, they should at least be able to sleep on a bench. But this new law does not give them that right. If the Salvation Army was busy before, daily challenges will be even more intense soon. The Salvation Army has big plans for expansion, but there's only so much its workers can do while that's in progress. And hostile architecture and legislation will soon send more people their way.

Jon Ritter feels more thought should be spent on the root causes of homelessness rather than banning public spaces. "You've got so many things that failed already in our system to create this crisis of people who have no other resort than debating about sleeping on a park bench," he says. "I think that shows you how these people or their struggles are not really a true priority in our culture." The issue of homelessness will not be fixed by getting rid of the places they sleep. "You're putting a lot on that poor bench to solve this problem," Ritter says.

The main reason hostile architecture is even an

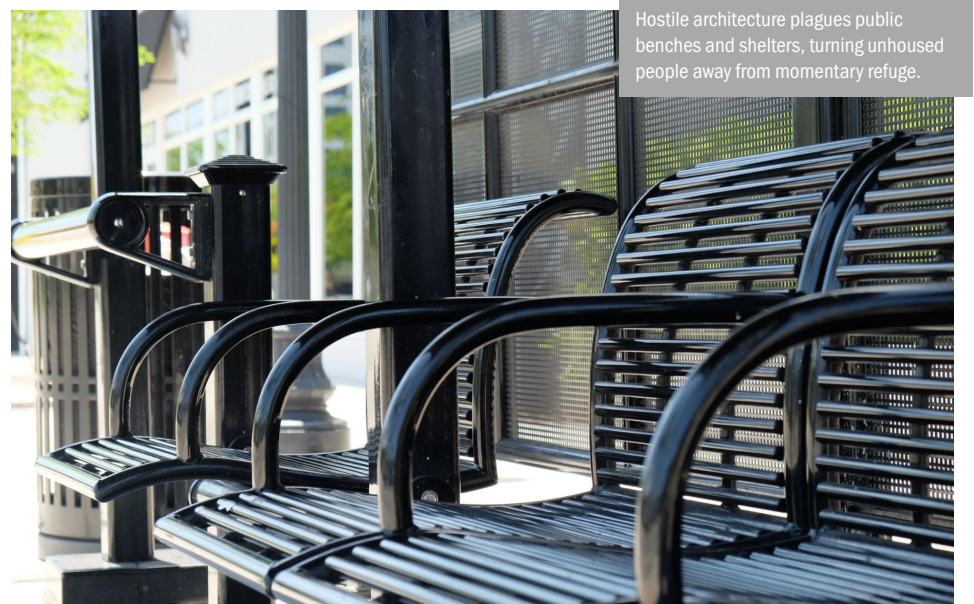
option is because business owners and elected officials want to keep the public "safe," which means assuming the worst of individuals who might need to sleep on a bench. Ritter thinks such hostile designs are an easy, short-term solution that isn't sustainable for the long run. He says, "I believe public spaces need to be inviting and accepting for everyone," after all, it is meant for a public community. This method of making the streets "clean and quiet" begs the question Ritter asks, "Who is the public?"

In Ritter's profession, he uncovers the meaning and message of the biggest art of all—architecture. He sees many perspectives surrounding hostile architecture, he knows business owners and unhoused individuals see it in a different way, but at large, he's skeptical about such designs. "One person's hostility could be another's defense," he says. This urban style goes all the way back to the '60s or '70s, where it was titled as defensive architecture. Originally, it was meant to protect private properties from people sleeping on their doorstep or breaking in. Now, it's being weaponized in public areas.

Hostile architecture is everywhere and people encounter it every day without realizing it. Ritter has observed a plethora of hostility, some that goes unnoticed. Lighting and music create the atmosphere for the environment. Many times, low lighting and little-to-no music will be implemented in a space, to subconsciously make people not want to go there. Lighting could also be weaponized in the opposite way. If an unhoused individual was looking for a bench to sleep on and the street light was blaring on them, hurting their eyes, it's clear that bench would be an irritating place to sleep. In some environments, music might be played at astronomical levels to deter sleeping. Many times, flower or plant beds will be orchestrat-



Rachel would contort his body and bend around bars on benches, or sleep on the ground.



Hostile architecture plagues public benches and shelters, turning unhoused people away from momentary refuge.

ed in a certain way that makes it hard for people to walk somewhere, sit, or go past a certain point. These are common in neighborhoods, parks and public streets.

People end up struggling on the streets all too often and are repeatedly ignored or even exiled from the only places they can go. How much longer will people have to sleep on the ground or contort their way around bars on benches? How much longer will public spaces exile homeless individuals for the sake of a 'clean and safe environment?' Pushing homeless people out and looking away from them will never improve anything. The dehumanization of unhoused individuals makes it easier to judge and render a rude remark, but it takes care and sincerity to look through the system's portrait of the less fortunate and show them that they are seen. Rather than yelling or judging, have a conversation, give them a place to sit down and a sense of hope. Don't look away, because we are all people, no matter our life circumstances.

HOW TO HELP?

To assist the unhoused community, you can donate or volunteer at your local food drive or shelter. Or visit fortlauderdale.salvationarmyflorida.org to find ways to give or ways to help.



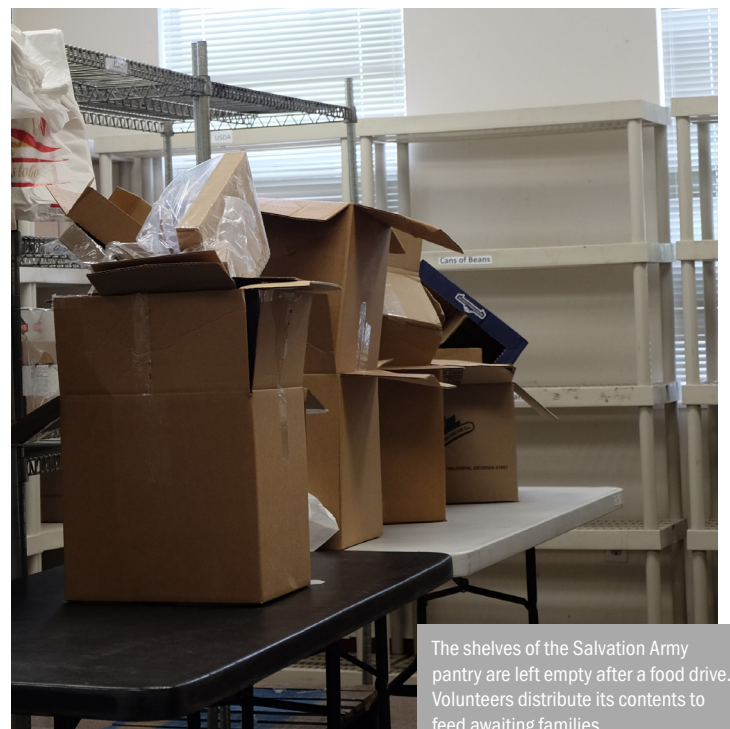
PHOTO CREDIT: MENA ZAVALA



Howard Hass patiently waits for his grocery bags from the Salvation Army's food drive. Cooking in the humid Florida sun, he is grateful he will be gifted with food.



David Hayton gives a tour of the Salvation Army, too often at full capacity, with a line at the door.



The shelves of the Salvation Army pantry are left empty after a food drive. Volunteers distribute its contents to feed awaiting families.



Lilly Gallardo, director of programs at the Salvation Army, believes everyone deserves housing.



The Salvation Army helps put meals on the tables of so many. The organization strives to create normalcy for families in times when everything is uncertain.



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