

City votes panhandlers away from traffic

By ANDREW TAN
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The red light is there waiting.

And so are they.

Once the cars stop, the panhandlers begin to ask for money — some want it for themselves, others for their charity.

Nevertheless, the practice may become a thing of the past.

In a unanimous vote, the Gainesville City Commission approved an ordinance that prohibits panhandling from both individuals and organizations. The measure needs one more approval from the Commission to become law.

"I think this is very much a safety issue."

Craig Lowe

Gainesville city commissioner

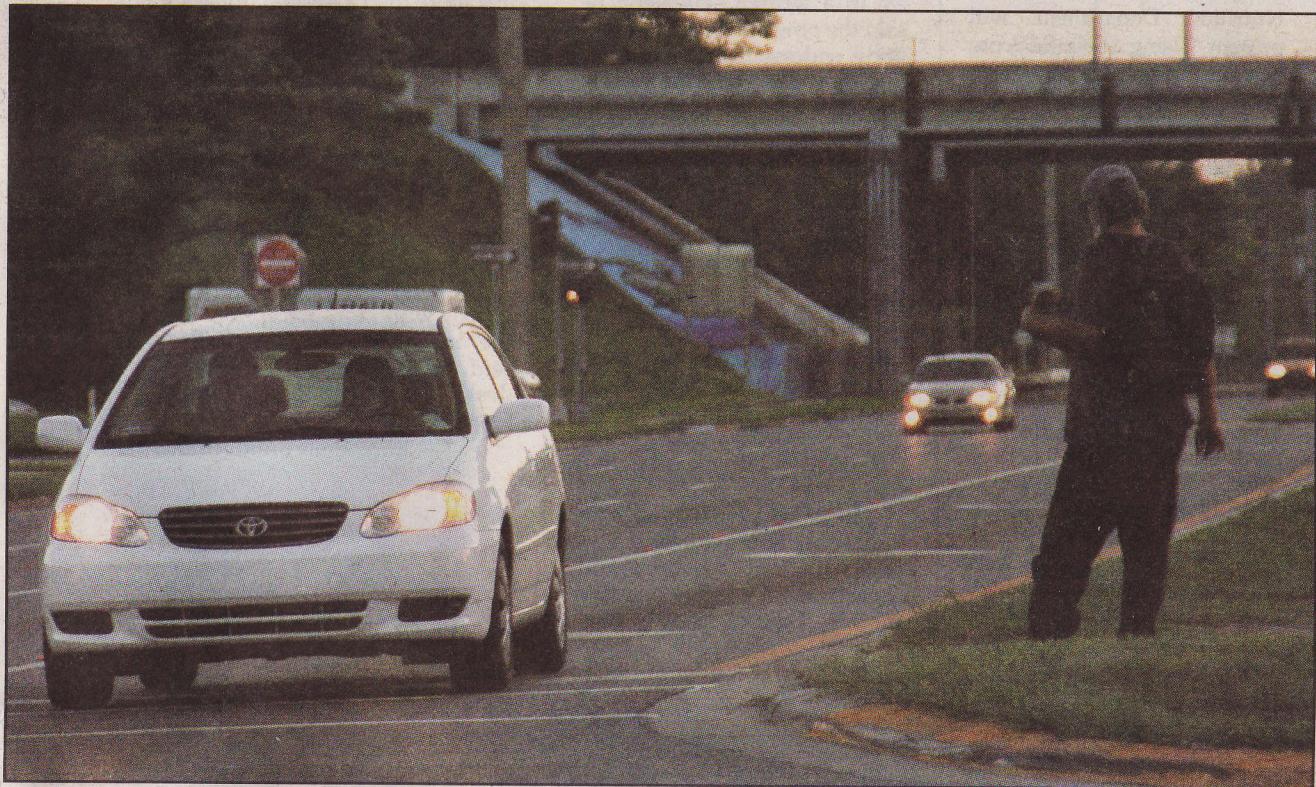
The ordinance prohibits the exchange of money between motorists and people on sidewalks or medians.

Commissioner Craig Lowe said, "I think this is very much a safety issue," going on to cite the small size of the median at the intersection of Waldo Road and East University Avenue as an example.

While the commission was unanimous in their vote, homeless advocates have been split on the issue.

Jon DeCarmine, director of the Alachua County / City of Gainesville Office on Homelessness, said he supported the measure because panhandlers can create a negative view of Gainesville's homeless. DeCarmine said a study in April showed that out of 22 panhandlers, only 12 were homeless,

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Charles Roop / Alligator Staff

A man panhandles on the corner of Southwest Archer Road and Southwest 40th Boulevard on Monday evening. The Gainesville City Commission voted to ban panhandling at a meeting Monday night.

Homeless advocates split on the vote **PANHANDLING**, from page 1

which is about 1 percent of the Gainesville homeless population.

However, homeless advocate Pat Fitzpatrick said he was against the measure.

"What the city is doing is un-Christian and un-American," he added.

Fitzpatrick said many of the panhandlers he has met

are homeless. He added he knows them personally.

David Herbert, who panhandled on Archer Road on Sunday, said the measure will drive the homeless into parking lots and may cause some to steal to survive.

"You have to eat," Herbert added.

While Herbert said he hopes to have a job by the time the measure goes into effect, he said if he doesn't, he will ask for money in parking lots.

The final approval of the ordinance will take place at the July 23 City Commission meeting.

End-of-semester trash treasure for some

■ OFFICIALS SAY REFUSE INCREASES 20 TO 25 PERCENT.

By ANDREW TAN
Alligator Writer

Mary Johnson peers into the open mouth of the green trash bin. With her plain black cane, she pokes and prods what's inside.

She twirls the cane to make the bag stick to it and then pulls it in close to see if there's anything worthwhile inside.

Johnson is just one of several Gainesville residents who have found many treasures in what students leave behind in their mass exodus for home.

"It's just like Christmas," she said.

Johnson said the primary motivation for her to do this is to help her friends. She said she often gives what she finds to her friends if she decides not to keep it for herself.

"I love helping people," she said.

The best times to do this, she said, are during the breaks between the spring and summer semesters and during Christmas break.

She said the most interesting thing she has found was a wedding band. She pawned it but didn't get much, she said.

Bob Shires, operations manager for Waste Management, said trash increases by about 20 percent to 25 percent during the times when students leave for home.

Shires said he views the practice of going through students' trash to find things to reuse as a positive thing.

He said it is especially helpful because it helps remove waste that would otherwise go into landfills.

Melissa Palmer, public education coordinator for Alachua County Public Works, runs a program called Tools for Schools. The program sets up boxes in dormitories and apartment complexes.

The school supplies students don't need — anything from pens and pencils to bulletin and dry-erase boards — can be put in these boxes to be made available to schoolteachers.

The program, now in its second year, has expanded from seven dorms to 11 dorms and several apartment complexes, Palmer said.

She said when the boxes were picked up on May 7, 11 boxes were

overflowing.

Palmer couldn't give an exact number but said the program filled two minivans with supplies.

"We collect a lot of amazing things," she said.



Charles Roop / Alligator Staff

Furniture lies in a dumpster at the Hidden Village Apartments. Trash accumulated over semester breaks is desired by "dumpster divers."

Budget cuts may cause homeless to suffer

■ CLOSURE OF THE OFFICE ON HOMELESSNESS WOULD NOT END THE 10-YEAR PLAN.

By ANDREW TAN

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Statewide budget cuts hit home recently when city and county officials considered closing an office integral to local plans to end homelessness.

On Thursday, City Manager Russ Blackburn unveiled a proposed budget amendment for Fiscal Year 2008, which runs from October to December, that eliminates city funding for the City of Gainesville/Alachua County Office on Homelessness.

The office, which began with the

implementation of the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness about a year ago, was designed to open service centers, increase support programs and help the local homeless population of about 1,000 people find homes and steady jobs.

The city and the county have stated that the closure of the office will not end the implementation of the plan.

Local News The county, which makes up the other half of the office's support, may also drop the program. County Manager Randall Reid said he will present his proposed budget this afternoon, adding that if the city decides to cut its part of the interlocal agreement that funds the office, he will recommend that the county cut its funding also.

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Despite budget woes, officials still hopeful

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Jon DeCarmine, director of the office and co-author of the 10-Year Plan, said the department's fate is uncertain but hopes the city will continue to address the problems of homelessness.

Assistant City Manager Lee Ann Lowery said the proposed budget ends funding for the Office on Homelessness because there was a feeling that existing city staff could "pick up the slack" caused by the office's elimination. However, DeCarmine said he was unsure if that is possible, adding that the 10-Year Plan was created because the city's resources were not enough to have a serious impact on homelessness.

Gail Monahan, executive director for the Alachua County Housing Authority, said she had concerns about how the elimination of the office would affect the 10-Year plan.

"I think they're undoing a lot of people's work," she said.

The city's budget cuts for the coming year are the result of a cut in property taxes that the state legislature passed in June. The city is expected to save around \$36,000 by eliminating the office's funding.

The City Commission will discuss the budget on July 17, 19 and 26.

Going, Towing, Gone

Tow-truck operator faces angry drivers

By ANDREW TAN

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While the word "hope" grips the steering wheel, a cigarette wedged in between "less" hangs outside the window of the blue Ford F-450 XLT tow truck.

His knuckles read "hopeless."

Ryan Williams, a manager of Watson's Towing, said he's had the ornately designed tattoos since he first started working in towing at age 23 or 24. Williams, now 32, said he got them when he was "young and dumb."

Williams has been towing in Gainesville for seven years, and he has dealt with "too many" people who have yelled at him. On Friday night, he allowed a reporter to accompany him as he made his rounds.

The idea for the tattoo, he said, originated in an argument with a customer that resulted in him getting chewed out by his boss. Later, he got the tattoos to show customers that fighting with him would be "hopeless."

On Friday night, Williams' truck cruises into College Park Apartments, a collection of apartment buildings owned by Paradigm Properties. As he passes down the asphalt labyrinth in the area north of University Avenue, students stare.

One student in a blue shirt exits his car, eyeing the truck.

Williams parks the truck a few feet over and drops out of the cab. He walks through the parking lot, looking for little white Paradigm decals with red lettering.

Some cars have them; a few have orange slips of paper that indicate they are guests.

Williams stops at a Nissan Pathfinder. He checks for that magic tag before breaking out his Kodak C530 EasyShare digital camera. He snaps a quick picture before he re-

turns to the truck.

While a picture has been taken, Williams leaves College Park without any cars in tow.

Around half an hour later, he returns to the Watson's Towing lot and meets up with a white Izusu tow truck.

Three trucks return to College Park more than a half hour after the initial inspection. The car that belonged to the wide-eyed man has moved from the tow-away spot.

Williams gets out to do another check of the vehicles. He said there were five he could have taken.

As he backs up to pick up the car, a drunken young woman rushes down the stairs shouting, "That's my car!"

While the white Izusu claims the Pathfinder, Williams backs up to take a black Nissan Xterra. In under a minute, he uses a yellow box to maneuver the head onto the wheels of the Nissan and grip it.

The Ford F-450 reaches the stop sign before Williams gets out to put on the warning lights and strap the Xterra into place. Why didn't he do this in the parking spot?

The truck was blocking the road and he didn't want to affect traffic.

"Trying to be courteous," he said with a smile.

"That's My Car!"

Williams moves quickly to the lot with the other trucks. He fills out the invoice for the SUV as he hits red lights.

After parking the cars in the lot, Williams once again leaves to find other cars.

He hops out in another parking lot near the Courtyards, a complex owned by Trimark Properties, where he finds a gray Honda Accord. As

Williams begins to back up, a man in a white shirt and shorts appears.

"Hey!" the UF student shouts.

The student arrives at his car before the tow truck has seized the car. Williams leaves the parking lot without a car attached.

He said he's not disappointed.

Later in the evening, Williams finds a yellow Xterra in College Park with no decal or guest slip. However, as he backs up to pick up the car, a drunken young woman rushes down the stairs shouting, "That's my car!"

A chorus of men at the balcony of an apartment down the street echo her, shouting, "That's her car."

The blonde pleads with Williams and tells him she is a resident. As he tells her the Xterra doesn't have a decal, she inspects the dash of the SUV.

"Oh, this isn't my car," she says.

She tells him he can tow it and shouts back to the crowd of voices that it's not her car. Before Williams can respond, she twirls around and struts her way back to the apartment down the street.

The Confrontation

Williams escapes many encounters without much confrontation, but as Friday night turns into early Saturday, he's headed for a showdown.

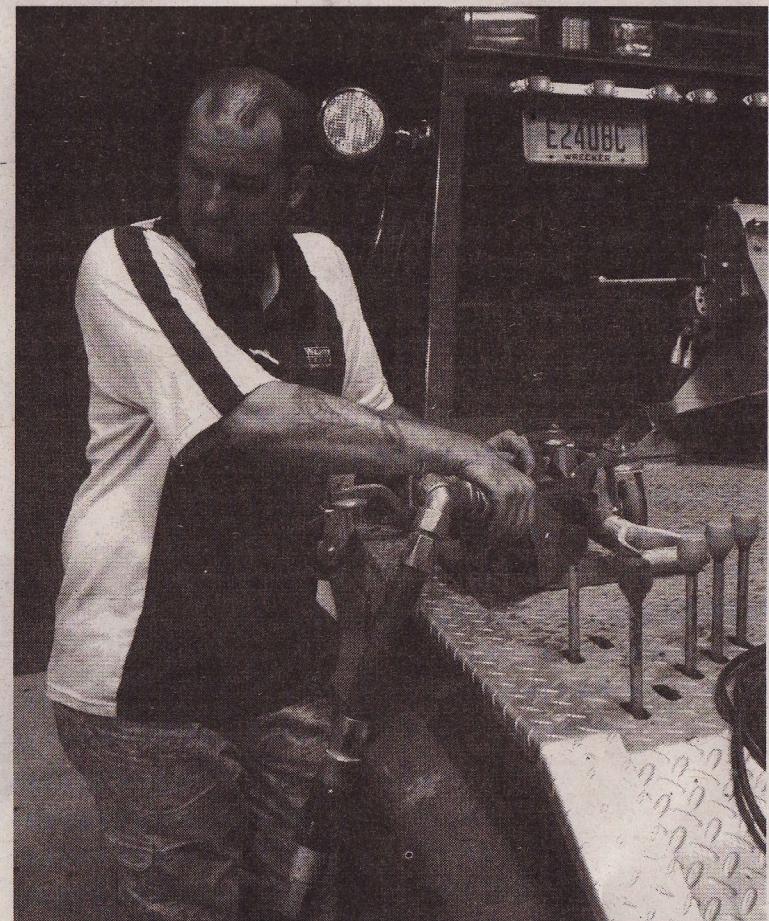
He walks through Stoneridge Apartments flashing pen-size flashlights on each car before a mustached man appears in a cowboy hat.

"Which one of you assholes towed my car?" the man asks, wearing glasses that resemble those of Theodore Roosevelt.

Williams tells the man he will need to talk to the office since he was not responsible for the tow.

The man, with a build slightly larger than Williams', continues to demand that his car be returned.

He was just visiting someone



Scott Robertson / Alligator Staff

Ryan Williams fills the tank of the tow truck he drives with diesel fuel before returning to towing cars.

who was not at home, the man said. He wasn't gone for more than ten minutes, he said.

Williams tells him that he will have to call the manager of the towing company on Monday.

As the dispute escalates, Williams begins to walk toward the truck.

The man follows.

Williams strides confidently and reaches the truck before him. The man knocks on the window and Williams rolls it down partially.

Again he demands his car.

Soon, the man reaches into the car and Williams darts his head out of the way. When the man is unable

to grab Williams, Williams rolls up the window and the man takes his hands out of the truck.

Just Another Night

At the end of the night, Williams returns to the Courtyards to find another illegally parked car.

A small female voice strains as she yells expletives at Williams.

Williams, unfazed by the woman, strolls through the Courtyards before returning to the truck.

As he returns, the voice again shouts "F*** you, towing!"

"Thank you," Williams says as he enters the truck.

Property foreclosures leave tenants evicted

By **ANDREW TAN**

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UF anthropology senior Sean Reilly knew it was coming since January.

And then one day in July, he said, the eviction notice was on his door.

The bank had foreclosed on his LaMancha apartment, it read, and he and his roommates would have to move out in 24 hours.

It's a common occurrence — tenants don't pay and are subsequently evicted.

But what's different about Reilly's evic-

tion story, and the stories of other UF students living around Gainesville, is that his eviction came from the landlord's failure to pay, not his.

Jerri Franz, spokeswoman for Regions Bank, which has foreclosed on several LaMancha properties, said a notice that the condo is being foreclosed should come about 30 days before anyone is evicted.

She said the reason the bank has to evict the students instead of going after the landlords is because the property must be readied to be sold by the bank.

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Several LaMancha foreclosures put complex's reputation in jeopardy

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"We are not in the business of renting property," Franz said.

Reilly's foreclosed condo was owned by Jose Andrade, who owned 11 condos in LaMancha and, as of Monday, now only owns one.

The address linked to Andrade through the Alachua County Property Appraiser's office is in Weston, Fla.

The Weston address is also linked to other Andrades who own property and, like Jose Andrade, have since had it foreclosed.

Phone calls and faxes made to the number listed for Andrade did not receive a response.

Reilly said toward the end of his stay at LaMancha, he had stopped paying rent because realtors in the area told him, since the unit was in foreclosure, he no longer had to pay.

Reilly said what originally attracted him to LaMancha was its close proximity to campus and the low cost of renting an apartment.

He was able to live with some friends for the three-and-a-half weeks he had between leaving LaMancha and starting a new lease with a new apartment complex, he said.

Reilly, who lived in LaMancha since 2003, said he lived in an apartment in the complex when it was switched to a condo because of its new owner.

At LaMancha, instead of one central agency running every apartment, different owners manage individual condos.

As a result, Reilly said, things got worse.

He said maintenance used to be taken care of faster when the units were apartments.

Reilly also said it was easier to pay rent, as he was able to pay at

the office and get a receipt instead of having to send it to a P.O. Box to get to his property manager, Chris Shurley.

Shurley was easy to contact to deal with issues in the beginning, Reilly said.

But now, Reilly said, "He's wildly impossible to get a hold of."

Shurley managed several condos other than Reilly's. David Cattermole, who bought property at LaMancha when it was being converted from apartments in October 2005, said Shurley managed his condo.

"The problems relate to one shady individual and his shady property manager, who unfortunately represented a good portion of the units."

JJ Kennedy

LaMancha condo owner

He said Shurley was property manager for about a year, and he decided to not use Shurley's services after a year because Shurley wasn't as responsive as Cattermole would have liked.

He wanted to know what was going on in the complex along with what tenants were going to be renting from his apartment. However, he said, Shurley was hard to get a hold of to discuss both issues.

Shurley could not be reached for comment. Calls to the number listed on his Web site were not returned, and an e-mail to him was bounced back.

While some have had a negative experience with Shurley, Betsy Sullivan said he was very helpful.

Sullivan said she and her husband bought a condo at LaMancha for her son to live in during his time

at UF.

She said when water started dripping down into her son's apartment from an apartment managed by Shurley, he responded to the problem quickly and took care of the necessary repairs.

"He was very professional," she said.

However, the recent controversy of several students being kicked out of their apartments for reasons they can't control has affected more than the evicted students.

LaMancha Condo Association President Joel Dubey said the situ-

ation may have affected the reputation of LaMancha.

"I understand this situation may have given LaMancha a black eye," he said.

JJ Kennedy, a condo owner in LaMancha, echoed Dubey's sentiments.

"The problems relate to one shady individual and his shady property manager," Kennedy wrote in an e-mail, "who unfortunately represented a good portion of the units."

Robert W. Bauer, a local attorney who specializes in landlord-tenant

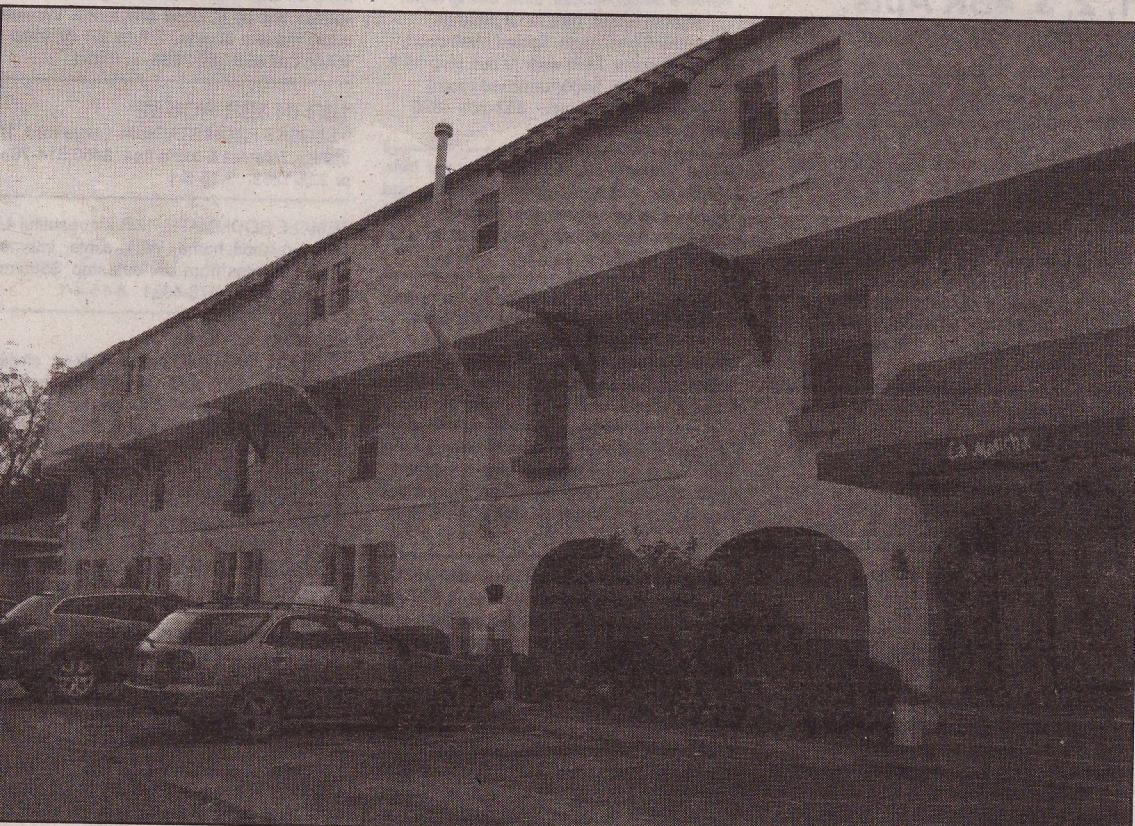
law, said students in a similar position to Reilly's may have a claim for monetary damages.

Other than losing property and owing money to the bank, Bauer said the foreclosure can ruin a landlord's credit.

"People really need to read their leases before they sign them," Bauer said.

For LaMancha, Dubey said, things are getting better because many, if not all, of the controversial units have been foreclosed on.

"Things are looking up for us," he said.



Nicole Safker / Alligator Staff

LaMancha Apartments, off S.W. Eighth Avenue, has had problems with landlords not paying their mortgages, causing tenant evictions.