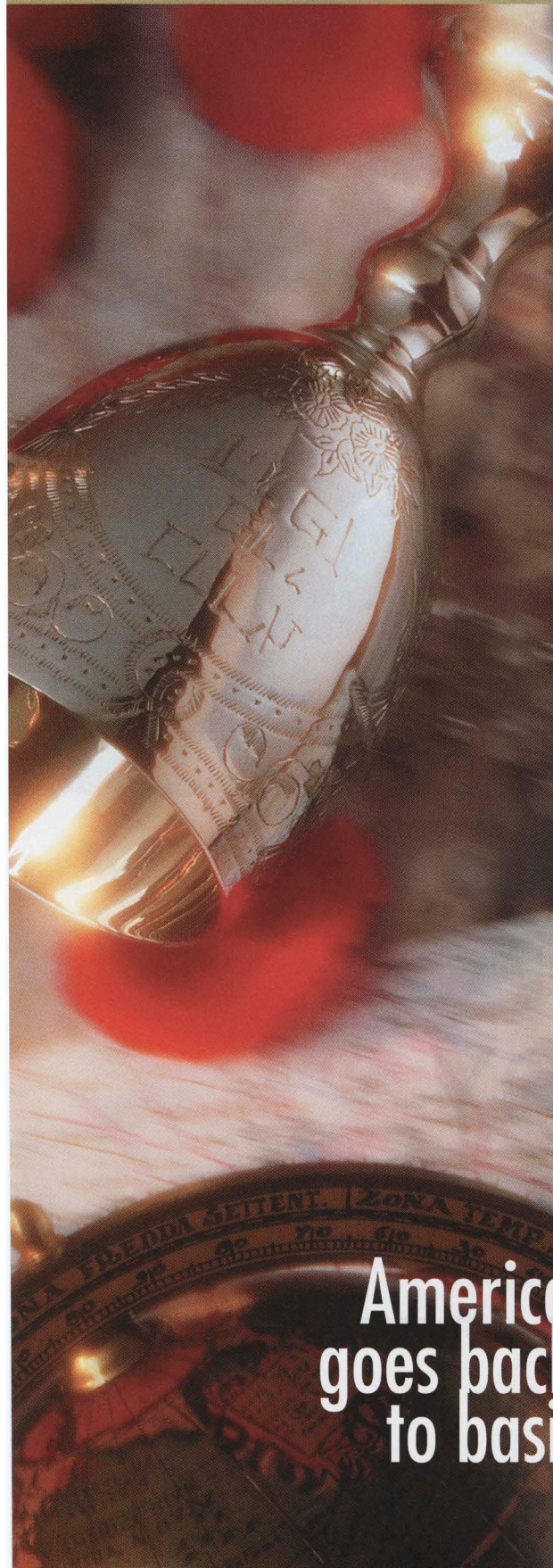


KINDER AND
GENTLER?
YOU BET.

RUDY HELLMANN PHOTOGRAPHY



America
goes back
to basics.

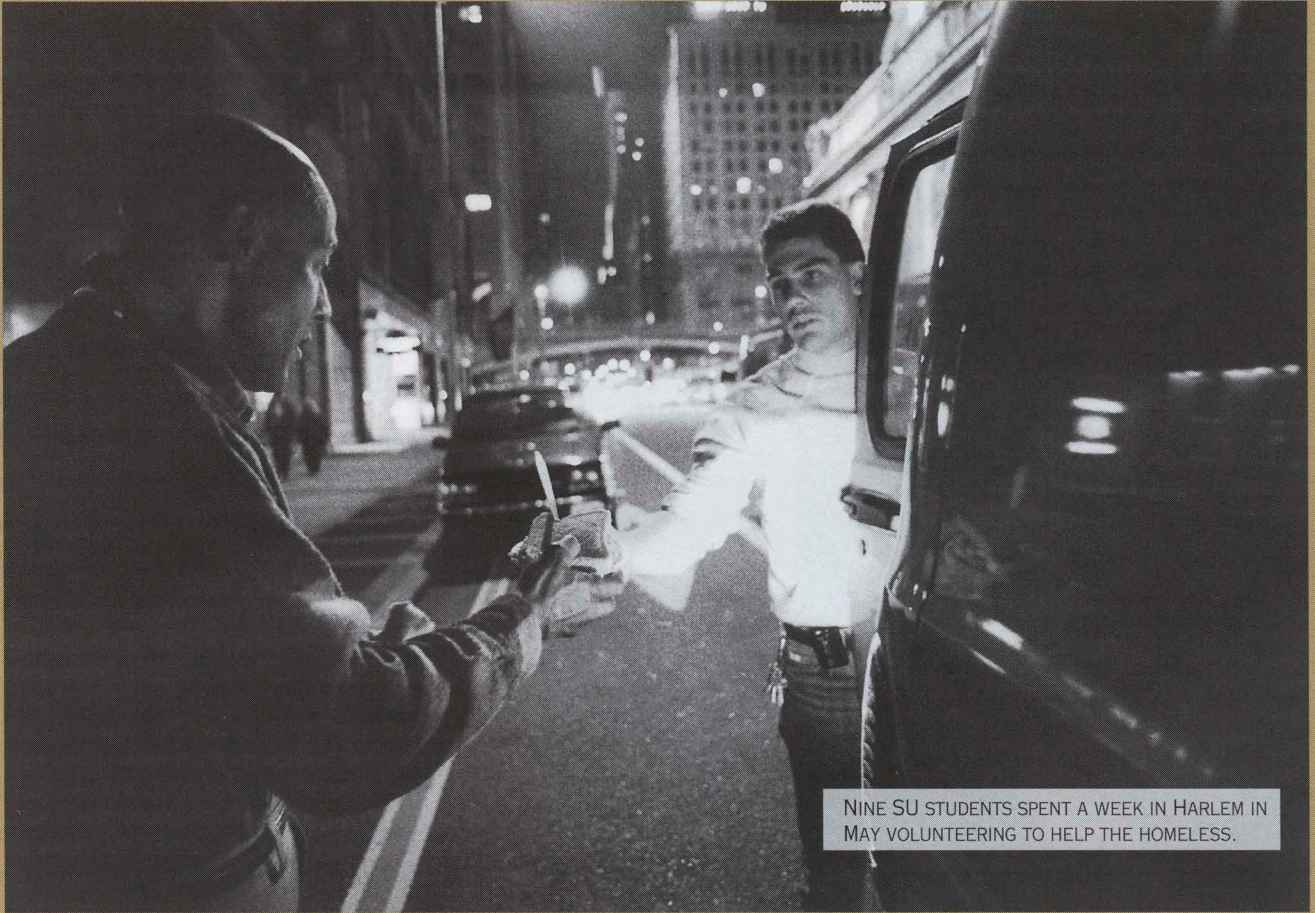
We all know the bad news. We hear it all the time: murder, guns in schools, rampant pollution, drugs, corrupt politicians. Sometimes it seems as though things have never been worse. It's no wonder the good news can't squeeze through the cracks. But it's there nonetheless.

Despite the complex problems facing the nation—or maybe because of them—Americans are going back to basics. Making the best of it. Looking on the bright side. Looking for answers.

College students have turned to community voluntarism. One young alum spent three years bicycling around the world to raise money for charity. Baby boomers are rediscovering organized religion. A prominent psychotherapist says the answers to the hunger people feel are rooted within themselves. And a landmark federal law is making life a little easier for people with disabilities.

In short, Americans are being nicer to each other. Being nicer to themselves. Being kinder and gentler.

Perhaps the catchphrase of the late eighties has finally caught on. Kinder and Gentler? Judge for yourself.



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NINE SU STUDENTS SPENT A WEEK IN HARLEM IN MAY VOLUNTEERING TO HELP THE HOMELESS.

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“WHAT IF NOBODY CARED?”

[VOLUNTARISM IS BECOMING A STAPLE OF STUDENT LIFE]

BY BOB HILL

Tonight's dinner guests include a mid-town family of four who reside in a corrugated cardboard box, a neatly dressed young woman whose most recent attempt to beat her drug addiction has failed, and a guy whose reward for 15 hours spent delivering the *New York Post* is a concrete bed outside Grand Central Station. His dash to devour a rare meal almost gets him run down crossing 42nd Street.

A middle-aged man with a scruffy beard, dusty black hat, and clothes that droop as if on a hanger stops by for tea only.

"Don't you want something to eat?" he's asked.

"No thanks," he replies. "I'm anorexic."

Another person, a guy who lives under a piece of plywood beneath the Brooklyn Bridge, is too distraught to accept food. He just wants his dog, the one impounded for biting a cop.

The Plaza Hotel and Lincoln Center don't rate on this weekly tour of Manhattan, which features places and faces most people choose to ignore when visiting New York City. This soup run is a late-night excursion in which members of the Emmaus House, a home for the formerly homeless, feed and clothe a fraction of the 200,000-some people living on the city's streets.

Tonight's four-hour, two-van swing includes a group of students from Syracuse University and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF). They spent part of the day sorting piles of secondhand pants, shirts, and shoes. Then came food preparation. They blended commercial-sized cans of stew and armfuls of boiled pasta into lobster pots. The stewed pasta was hoisted into the vans along with a garbage bag bursting with day-old bread, another with donated pastries, plus a barrel of tea. The food may provide a week's worth of nourishment to as many as 400 people, including the old man who stops to chat with several students. Offered more food, he declines.

"Save it for somebody else to eat, somebody who needs it more than

me," he says, departing with a wave and a blessing.

"I love this city," says Alex Francois, an ESF senior from nearby Rockland County, "but I've come here for years and just ignored these people. But when you see them like this, up close, you see they're real people, nice people. You have to look at them differently. It makes you think differently about a lot of things."

Some people donate a few dollars here and there. Some donate clothes and food. Nine students and an administrative adviser donated the second week in May to serving the Emmaus House in Harlem, described by one student as a place where "reality is just outside your doorstep" and the sidewalk decor includes "homelessness, drug addiction, crack babies, prostitution, and kids whose parents are on drugs."

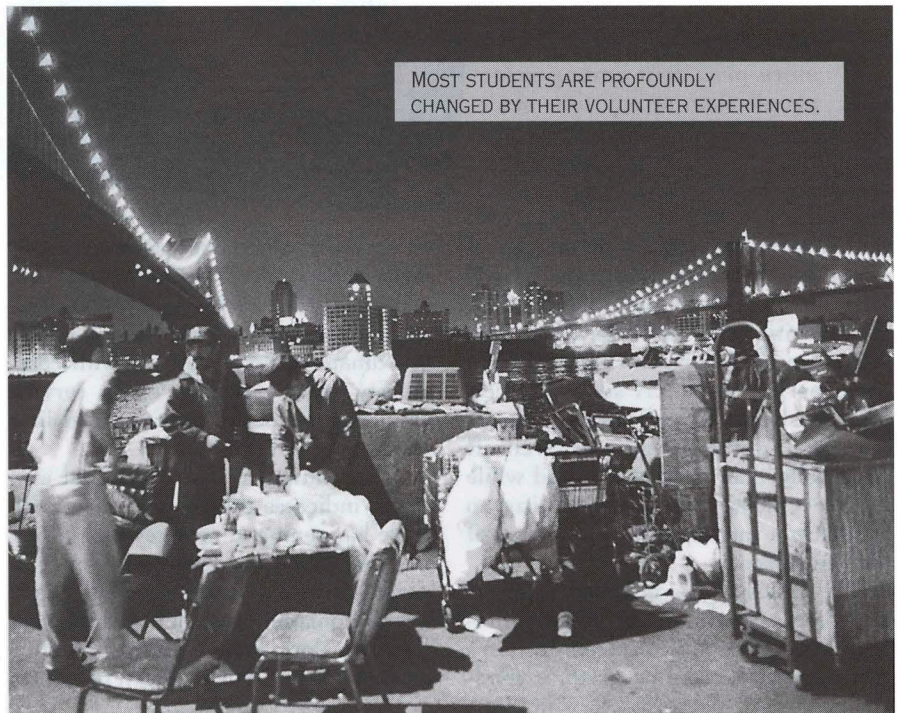
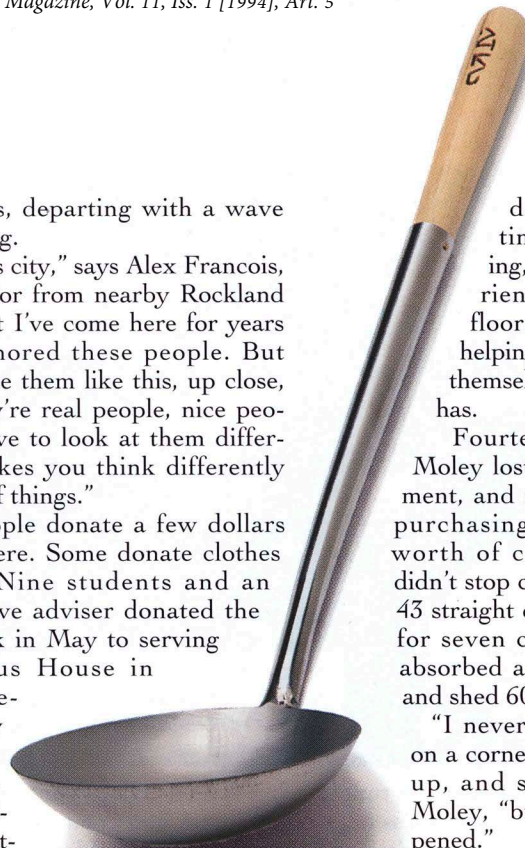
The trip was arranged by Students Offering Service, a Syracuse University volunteer organization. The stu-

dents spent their time painting, cleaning, cooking, and experiencing life in a five-floor oasis dedicated to helping the homeless help themselves, as John Moley has.

Fourteen months earlier Moley lost his job, his apartment, and nearly his life after purchasing almost \$12,000 worth of crack cocaine. He didn't stop consuming crack for 43 straight days, went sleepless for seven consecutive nights, absorbed a bullet in each leg, and shed 60 pounds.

"I never wanted to end up on a corner homeless, cracked up, and screwed up," says Moley, "but that's what happened."

The students include a return visitor from the previous May, Anand Aidasani, a junior from Montville, New Jersey. Moley, sober and straight for nearly a year, greets him with a hug. Aidasani came to Syracuse University to prepare for medical school and a lifetime of prosperity. Now he's learning how he can use his schooling to



MOST STUDENTS ARE PROFOUNDLY CHANGED BY THEIR VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES.

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PHOTOS BY STEVE BARTORI



SU STUDENTS CONTRIBUTE NUMEROUS HOURS TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY, INCLUDING THIS SORORITY-SPONSORED KIDS FEST LAST SPRING.

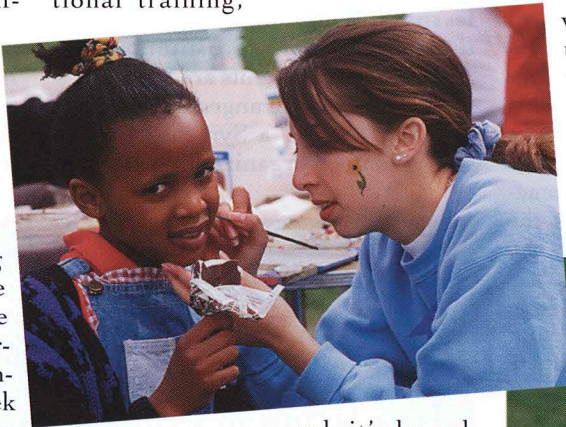
help empower people less fortunate than Moley and assist places less organized and defined than the Emmaus House.

"The trip here last year changed my whole life," says Aidasani. "The whole mentality of this country is too self-serving. That's not right. I want to do things to help people. My parents don't understand why I want to do something that won't make me a lot of money, but working with people who need help is more important to me. It just feels right."

This sentiment is becoming more prevalent among more people than at any time since the sixties. It's estimated that 25 percent of all college students now volunteer an average of five hours a week for community-service projects. Recent polls indicate the percentage of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 who volunteer at least a day of their time during the course of a year has risen significantly since 1988. Over the same period, a UCLA survey of college freshmen found the number of students hoping to become "well-off financially" has steadily declined while the percentage of those aiming to "develop a meaningful philosophy of life" increased.

The Peace Corps is hiring students and recent graduates in record numbers. AmeriCorps, President Clinton's new national service program, is send-

ing 20,000 college students and recent graduates into communities across the nation to rebuild parks, immunize babies, tutor teens, and care for the elderly. In return, participants receive education awards for college or vocational training,



and, it's hoped, an enduring thirst for community service. In response to student demand, many colleges—including SU—are creating public-service centers to better coordinate volunteer efforts with community needs. In many cases, service activities are being incorporated into classroom curricula.

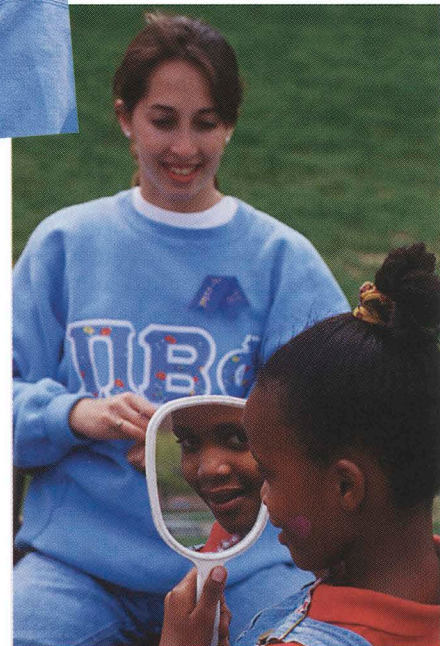
"The statistical and anecdotal evidence indicates there's definitely a lot more happening at colleges today than five years ago and there are plenty of signs that this is not just a fad," says Frank Pomata, program coordinator at the New York State Governor's Office for Voluntary Service, which promotes

and recognizes voluntarism and lends assistance in various ways.

"Young people today aren't as interested in yelling and screaming about things, as may have happened 20 and 30 years ago," says Pomata. "They're more practical. They want to see results and they're trying to create long-lasting change. When young people see issues on campus, or see hunger and homelessness in their communities, they want to do something about it, and they're more willing to work with their universities to accomplish these tasks."

They're also doing it because volunteering has become "the thing to do" on many college and university campuses, says Nan Strickland, who interacts with hundreds of SU students as volunteer coordinator of the Volunteer Center in Syracuse. "College students are really compassionate and they're hungry to help out. They want to feel like they can really make a difference, and in many cases, they are making a difference."

That's true at Syracuse University, where students have volunteered vacation time to haul trash in Camden, New Jersey, shovel mud in flood-ravaged Alexandria, Missouri, and rebuild hurricane-damaged houses in Dade County, Florida. Closer to campus, they've cleaned



parks, tutored underprivileged children, taught adults to read, visited the elderly and infirm, conducted canned-good drives and voter registrations, and held everything from Easter egg hunts to spaghetti dinners to raise money for places like soup kitchens and youth centers.

"A lot of people think all SU students are apathetic," says Vanessa Kearney, a junior from Williamsville, New York, "but there are people on this campus who are *really* involved."

Estimates indicate some-2,000 Syracuse University students volunteered at least once during the past academic year. "There has been an awakening to voluntarism and public service on this campus, and from what students tell me, part of it is a way to make sense of what's going on in the world around them," says Pam Heintz, director of Syracuse University's Center for Public and Community Service, a newly formed umbrella organization for all campus service activity, and former director of SU's student volunteer center.

"Many of the students who come to us are just looking for a place to volunteer," says Heintz. "Some come to fill public-service requirements for class. Some come to beef up their resumé, since many corporations are looking for volunteer service experience. We don't care why they come here, we just want them to come. No matter why they're here, my feeling is that 60 to 70 percent of them are profoundly changed by their experiences. They may or may not do anything more for years, but they'll be affected by what they do here and it will stay with them."

Warren Buck, a senior from Ithaca, New York, began volunteering when he "got sick of sitting in class and just discussing the problems in the world instead of doing something about them."

Buck, president of the campus chapter of Habitat for Humanity, a national organization that provides housing for low-income families, says "students can get pretty isolated on campus. They don't really see what's happening outside their world. I did a few things, tutored some kids, and saw it can real-

VOLUNTEER CENTRAL

Kathleen Hinchman teaches reading and language arts and coordinates the volunteer activities of many students in the School of Education. "Every semester during the last five years at least one student has come to me and said there's a lot of volunteer activity going on at SU, but it's not really organized," says Hinchman. "In the past, every effort and activity had to be started from scratch. Finally, there's a place to seek advice and help with logistical concerns."

That place is the Center for Public and Community Service. Launched in January, it serves as an umbrella organization for all University-related service efforts, promoting, supporting, facilitating, and recognizing public and community service as a fundamental part of the teaching and learning experience for students, faculty, and staff. The Center hopes to increase awareness of the role of public service in education, develop student leadership through service activities, and foster lasting commitments to civic responsibilities.

The Center, which received a three-year start-up grant from the Carrier Corporation, was spearheaded by Mary Ann Shaw, wife and associate of the chancellor.

"There's a definite resurgence occurring in voluntarism and public service, and we want to build on what's going on here at Syracuse and help the movement grow," says Shaw. "I see the Center working closely with faculty members who want to develop ways to get students involved in the community through classes. I also see us working closely with the residence halls and new students, so they can find out right from the beginning the volunteer opportunities available to them."

—BH

ly make a difference. Now I do as much volunteering as I can fit in my schedule. It brings education into the real world."

The real world is also coming to more and more classrooms.

Syracuse University is one of several colleges and universities attempting to integrate voluntarism and community service into a classroom movement called service learning. In a public-affairs course taught last year by associate professor Neil Katz, undergraduate students formed consulting teams to work with low-income elderly people at a local housing project. The students interviewed the tenants, gathered and organized the data, presented it to the tenants, and taught them a problem-solving model. The tenants then went about resolving their own

problems.

"Classes like this are important because they allow students to tackle actual problems in the community and, in doing so, tear down a lot of walls that have emerged between town and gown," says Katz. "It allows people to see the University more as a resource for the community at large, and it allows for different images to emerge about the kind of people who populate the University."

These people include junior Alison O'Connell, who watched in amazement as a crush of homeless people awaited lunch one day outside Harlem's Emmaus House.

"What if there were no one to feed the homeless like this?" she asked. "It's kind of scary to think about what might happen if nobody cared." ■