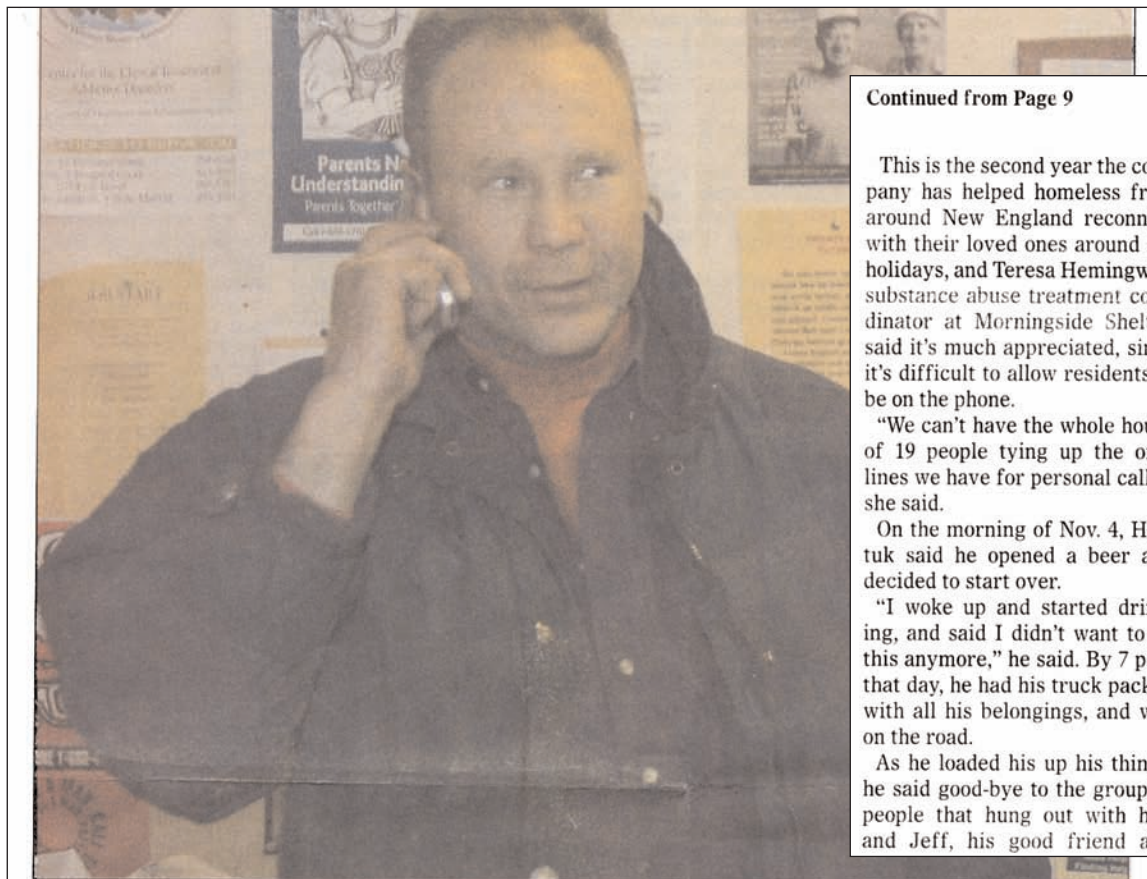




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This is the second year the company has helped homeless from around New England reconnect with their loved ones around the holidays, and Teresa Hemingway, substance abuse treatment coordinator at Morningside Shelter, said it's much appreciated, since it's difficult to allow residents to be on the phone.

"We can't have the whole house of 19 people tying up the only lines we have for personal calls," she said.

On the morning of Nov. 4, Hurtuk said he opened a beer and decided to start over.

"I woke up and started drinking, and said I didn't want to do this anymore," he said. By 7 p.m. that day, he had his truck packed with all his belongings, and was on the road.

As he loaded his up his things, he said good-bye to the group of people that hung out with him and Jeff, his good friend and

neighbor.

"They didn't really think I was going to do it," he said. It wasn't until the flash of that final picture of Hurtuk and Jeff shaking hands, that reality struck.

Jeff was the other person Hurtuk called and he was glad to be in touch with him, especially around Christmas. They updated each other on their lives, and promised to get together soon, and although Hurtuk misses his friend, he said he better off in Vermont.

"This is a good place for people who want to get straight — a good kick for people like me."

Back in Tennessee, Hurtuk was on disability, in need of knee surgery that he didn't seem to be getting, and frustrated. He said it was easy to slip into a lifestyle that wouldn't exactly improve his situation.

"I have so many talents and I was wasting away," he said.

Cate Lecuyer can be reached at clecuyer@reformer.com or (802) 254-2311, ext. 271.

David Shaw/Special to the Reformer

A resident of the Morningside shelter makes a free phone call to a long distance friend.

A holiday hello

Morning Shelter residents get a chance to call home

By CATE LECUYER

Reformer Staff

BRATTLEBORO — Last month Joseph Hurtuk got in his car in Tennessee and started driving.

Some people thought he was going to stay with his father in Connecticut, which didn't work out. Others thought he was going to Florida, which is what he wanted the people whom he owed money to think.

Hardly anyone knew he was living in Brattleboro until Monday, when he picked up a cell phone at Morningside Shelter and made a free long-dis-

tance call to Karen Fergeson, a friend he used to live with in Tennessee.

Last Thanksgiving and Christmas he ate dinner with her and her husband, Dwane, and after losing touch with her for the past four months, the seasonal call seemed appropriate, and brought the recipient to tears.

"She was like a mother to me," Hurtuk said. "If I told her I was living in a shelter she would send me money."

Instead, he told her he had a small apartment, which he hopes will be true. Eventually.

"This is where I want to be right

now," he said. He's getting his life back.

"I've been here for two weeks and I've been sober for two weeks."

Hurtuk made the call for free through U.S. Cellular, which sponsors the "free-call" program during the holidays at homeless shelters and soup kitchens. A representative from the company said about half a dozen residents used the phones to call friends and family from the shelter on Monday.

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