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# Plain Talk: Three who lived with homeless helped open eyes

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3 hours ago • DAVE ZWEIFEL | The Capital Times editor emeritus | dzweifel@madison.com (0) Comments



I ran in to Michael Johnson, the indefatigable CEO of Madison's Boys & Girls Club, at the Cargo Coffee shop the other morning and congratulated him on his foray into the city's homeless world.

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A screenshot from the video released recently by Boys & Girls Club CEO Michael Johnson shows Johnson, left, and Metcalfe's Market owner Tim Metcalfe in their homeless disguises.

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## About the columnist



Editor Emeritus Dave Zweifel has been with The Capital Times since he graduated from UW-Madison in 1962, serving as the paper's editor in chief from 1983 to 2008. He was president of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council for 15 years, served as a Pulitzer Prize judge in 2000 and 2001, and named to the Wisconsin Newspaper Hall of Fame in 2011. A native of New Glarus, Wis., where he grew up on a farm, he serves on several non-profit boards and is a military veteran, having served on active duty as a field artillery officer in the early 1960s and for 26 years in the Wisconsin Army National Guard where he retired as a colonel in 1993.



That took a lot of guts, I told him, but he discounted it, insisting that it was simply doing something to understand the misunderstood a bit better.

Johnson, for those of you who missed the story, and two friends — Tim Metcalfe of Metcalfe's Market and Will Green, director of the Salvation Army's Community Center — spent three days and two nights undercover as homeless people, sleeping on the street and in a homeless shelter with the real homeless, if for no other reason than to give us all a better picture of homelessness in our community.

The Boys & Girls Club leader said the experience was a real eye opener for him, Green and Metcalfe. As documented in detail by our **reporter Pat Schneider**, the three learned how the homeless cope and why many of them are there in the first place.

As Metcalfe told Schneider, the experience belied the stereotypes many of us have about homelessness: that they're homeless because of substance abuse or mental problems. In fact, the three discovered, many homeless actually have jobs and like other Madisonians get up in the morning and go to work.

They just don't have the wherewithal to afford housing, some because they have bad credit histories or criminal records.

Johnson told me they were able to identify some homeless people who they believe might qualify for assistance so they can get off the streets.



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To help spread the story of what they found, **they've produced a video** documenting their experiences. It's very much worth viewing.

These three Madisonians deserve a big thanks for helping open our eyes to what we'd rather not see.

Dave Zweifel is editor emeritus of *The Capital Times*. [dzweifel@madison.com](mailto:dzweifel@madison.com)

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**Tags** Dave Zweifel, Plain Talk, Homelessness, Michael Johnson, Will Green, Tim Metcalfe, Madison Wisconsin

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