

# Business owner knows firsthand how losing a job feels

By Jim Shelton Register Staff

---

**WOODBIDGE** — It took some getting used to, but John Jezierny has the whole work-from-home thing figured out now.

It's kind of a mix-and-match schedule. He's up at 6:20 a.m. to make his 16-year-old daughter Jocelyn's lunch, sees her off to school, grabs a shower and has breakfast.

Today, that would be Rice Krispies, cranberry juice, a vitamin and a chocolate doughnut.

At some point he goes to work, in the guest room on the second floor. That's where he's got his main computer, his laptop and assorted paperwork for Creative Solutions for Business, his graphics and advertising design company.

"I may start at 8 or I may not," he laughs, after shooting off an e-mail to a client. "I might stop and do lawn stuff in the middle of the day.

Sometimes I'll work straight through until midnight. There's never a question of when I'm coming home from work. I AM home."

Jezierny, 59, is trim, has gray hair and is dressed in jeans, black shoes and a light gray pullover. He's perpetually at ease in conversation, whether on his cell phone over a business matter or answering questions about his life. For example, he's quite open about the shock he felt two years ago when he lost his job doing graphic design for a dental products company in Shelton.

"It was like someone putting a diving bell over my head," he recalls. "I couldn't hear anything around me, except the sentence, 'You don't work here anymore.—"

But he perseveres, bolstered by the income of his wife, Carol, who works for a large office products firm. She has an office adjoining his in their handsome, well-kept house on a quiet, woodsy street.

This is a family that believes in volunteering, from food and clothing drives to supporting the arts. Jezierny donates graphics work to the New Haven Symphony Orchestra, for instance, and for the Columbus House shelter.

On this day, he reviews corrections for copy he wrote for an NHSO fundraiser. He talks with one client in Jersey City and another in Milford. For lunch, he had some leftover Mexican food. The Afternoon wanes.

# Jobless and homeless, the long climb from the bottom begins

By Jim Shelton

Register Staff

---

NEW HAVEN — Robert Perry gets up at 5 a.m. most days.

He's got his own alarm clock, though he doesn't need it, and plenty of clothes, but not much else. Perry, 43, says he lost his apartment earlier this year after a foot injury put him out of work. He's been staying at the Columbus House shelter on Ella T. Grasso Boulevard the past six weeks.

"I broke two bones in my right foot," Perry explains. "I do auto body technician work. I dropped a welding machine, the big tube-thing with it, on my foot."

His is a life in transition, buffeted by economic hardship, random accident, personal demons and the increasing morning chill. The next few months will be decisive, seeing him either regain his livelihood and a place of his own, or fall prey to a daunting, long-term bout of homelessness.

Perry is a big man-. He has a full beard and wears the detached look of a person who must gird himself for any sort of interaction or confrontation, at any time. It's a sharp contrast from his demeanor around people he likes, when he's downright gentle. He's dressed in work jeans, tan work boots and a heavy pullover Mets sweatshirt.

A little after 7:30, he walks down the street to a bus stop. "Usually I go over to Connecticut Works, right around the corner," he says. "But that's closed today. I'll go to TIC on Whalley Avenue today."

Connecticut Works is a state-run career program that offers everything from resume writing seminars to Internet access. TIC is the Taking Initiative Center, a storefront operation that helps people in the preliminary stages of dealing with drug and alcohol addiction.

The center doesn't open until 8:30 a.m. A clutch of people huddle around the front door waiting to enter.

Inside, there is a front room with couches, a TV set, a fish tank and three computers with Internet access. Another room is set up like a small cafe. There's also a washer and dryer on the premises, and a pair of telephones for making local calls.

Perry spends the day here. He sends out job inquiries and e-mails, eats a baloney and cheese sandwich for lunch, attends a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, shoots the breeze with some of the regulars and participates in a meditation group.

"It lets you reflect on something positive," he says, "instead of the things that are negative."

# Fate: Two men, one story at Columbus House

*Continued from El*

Then in the evening,

worlds collide — if only for a moment.

By now the sun has receded. Robert Perry takes another bus ride, back to the Columbus House shelter. John Jezierny hops in his gray sport utility vehicle and drives into New Haven.

Perry has a room upstairs at the shelter. He's what they call a "length of stay" client, meaning he can store his belongings there for an extended period while he takes tangible steps to improve his situation. Perry's goal is to find work and save \$2,000 so he can get an apartment.

"The staff here is awesome," he says. "They're very, very patient."

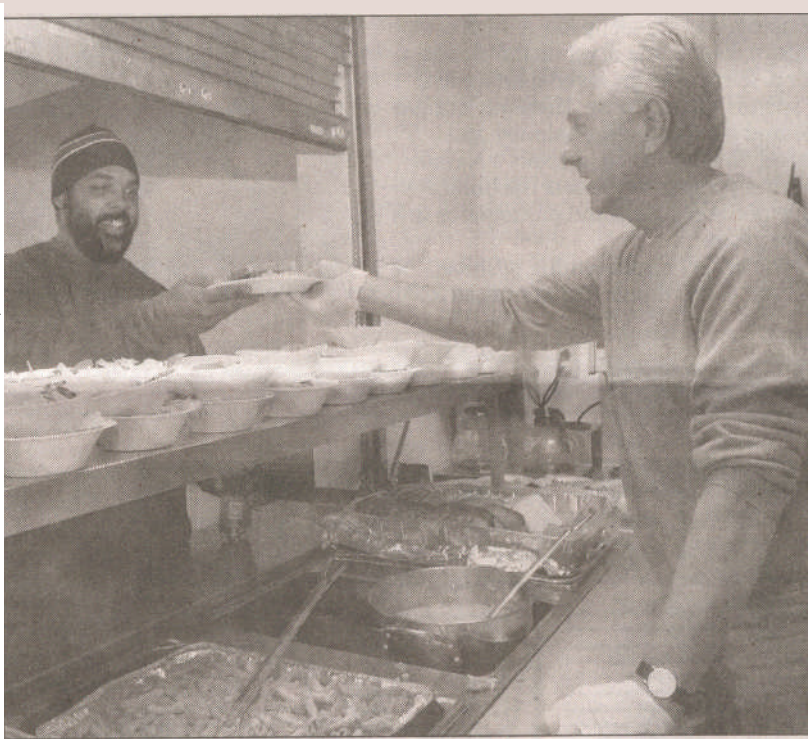
Some evenings, he arrives back at Columbus House much later. Perry's mother lives in New Haven, and he has four children, ages 26, 25, 14 and 10, three of whom are in New Haven.

"I see my ones who are here," Perry says. "They don't judge me. My mom helps me a lot with my kids."

Asked why he chose to stay at the shelter rather than rely on family, he says, "I can't do that to them. I'm 43 years old. I gotta stand on my own."

He attends an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting at the shelter, before going outside with other clients for a cigarette. Some of them kid Perry about becoming a media star.

Jezierny is in the lobby. He has a



Melanie StengeV/Registe

Robert Perry, left, and John Jezierny at supper time in Columbus House.

bag of pots and pans to donate, but he doesn't want to just barge in as one-night clients file in to secure dinner and a place to sleep. Jezierny asks if he can help serve the meal.

A staff member takes him to the shelter's kitchen, where members of the Orange Congregational Church are preparing meatloaf, ziti, quiche, salad, bread and fresh fruit. They allow Jezierny to don rubber gloves and assemble plates of food.

One of them, he hands to Perry.

Dinner at the shelter is a quick, assembly-line situation so that each

client can get a meal and have time to go back for seconds if there's leftover food. Additional plates are set aside for clients who work and can't get back to Columbus House until later. Some clients are on cleanup detail, marching into the kitchen after dinner to scrub pots and tidy up the area.

Jezierny leaves early to get his bag of kitchenware and bring it inside. He thanks the staff and pulls on his coat. His dinner awaits.

"I have no idea what I'll make when I get home," he says. Perry expects

he'll follow his usual evening rituals, which include watching a little TV in the community room, talking to his sponsor on the phone and going to bed early.

"I go to bed no later than 10," Perry says.

He is asked about his prospects. "I get discouraged sometimes," he notes. "I'm homeless, man. But I believe it's going to get better. It can't get worse."

*Jim Shelton can be reached at (203) 789-5664 or [jshelton@nhregister.com](mailto:jshelton@nhregister.com)*