

Santa Monica Daily Press

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Making a cameo for the homeless

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WEST HOLLYWOOD — Mike Hennessey is looking to change the world, one aluminum can, plastic bottle or glass container at a time. The actor has just launched a non-profit called EXTRA Cans for the Needy (ECFTN), a program designed by a group of movie and television extras who are collecting all recyclables on every set and delivering them to the homeless.

"It's more than just recycling to save the environment," Hennessey said. "It's about recycling a life."

The initiative isn't limited to just extras on movie sets. Hennessey is encouraging everyone to participate and take some "extra" time each day to collect any empty cans they have at home, school or at the office and drop them off at local shelters or hand them out to those living on the streets.

Hennessey is envisioning a program where there are gold bins stationed outside grocery stores and public buildings where homeless people can be free to take empties and recycle them for cash without having to rummage through dirty garbage and recycling bins.

The idea, which Hennessey came up with in October after spending a day on the set of E.R., is similar to the "Take a Penny, Leave a Penny" idea used in many convenience stores. It is the goal of ECFTN to turn this into a contest for school children and teens to see who can collect the most cans and bottles for the needy. Eventually, Hennessey would like to see schools, churches, temples, AIDS and other health foundations utilize this as a means of fundraising.

Hennessey said he started picking up bottles while on the set of "E.R." and the upcoming Adam Sandler-Kevin James movie "I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry."

"I just couldn't believe how many cans and bottles we had lying around the set," he said. "Each person must have drunk like eight bottles. I just thought how great his could be if we could get everyone involved. We're talking about 5 cents or so per can. That can really add up when you get hundreds of people involved. We're talking about some serious money."

Hennessey said within a few weeks he has been able to recruit more than 200 extras, and the list continues to grow.

Giving 'EXTRA' help to homeless

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"I have many people from Santa Monica who are involved and I would love for the city to take the lead on this," said Hennessey, who plans to reach out to city officials to sponsor the gold bins.

Those interested in the program can go to www.extracansfortheneedy.org and learn how to set up a gold bin in their neighborhood.

"If (the homeless) want to spend the money on Jack Daniel's then so be it. I'm not here to judge," said Hennessey. "What I really want though is for them to use the money to get them through some rough times, to give them some extra help as they try to climb back up that ladder."