

Fest aims to humanize homelessness

But funding cut threatens street event

IRWIN BLOCK
THE GAZETTE

They were out in the hundreds last night in Place Émilie Gamelin, braving the minus 3C chill.

Street people, artists and volunteers warmed up to one another at the start of a five-day celebration with an unusual name.

Most were unaware that this 12th edition of *État d'urgence* – organized by a husband-and-wife team of artists who founded *Action terroriste socialement acceptable* – may be its last.

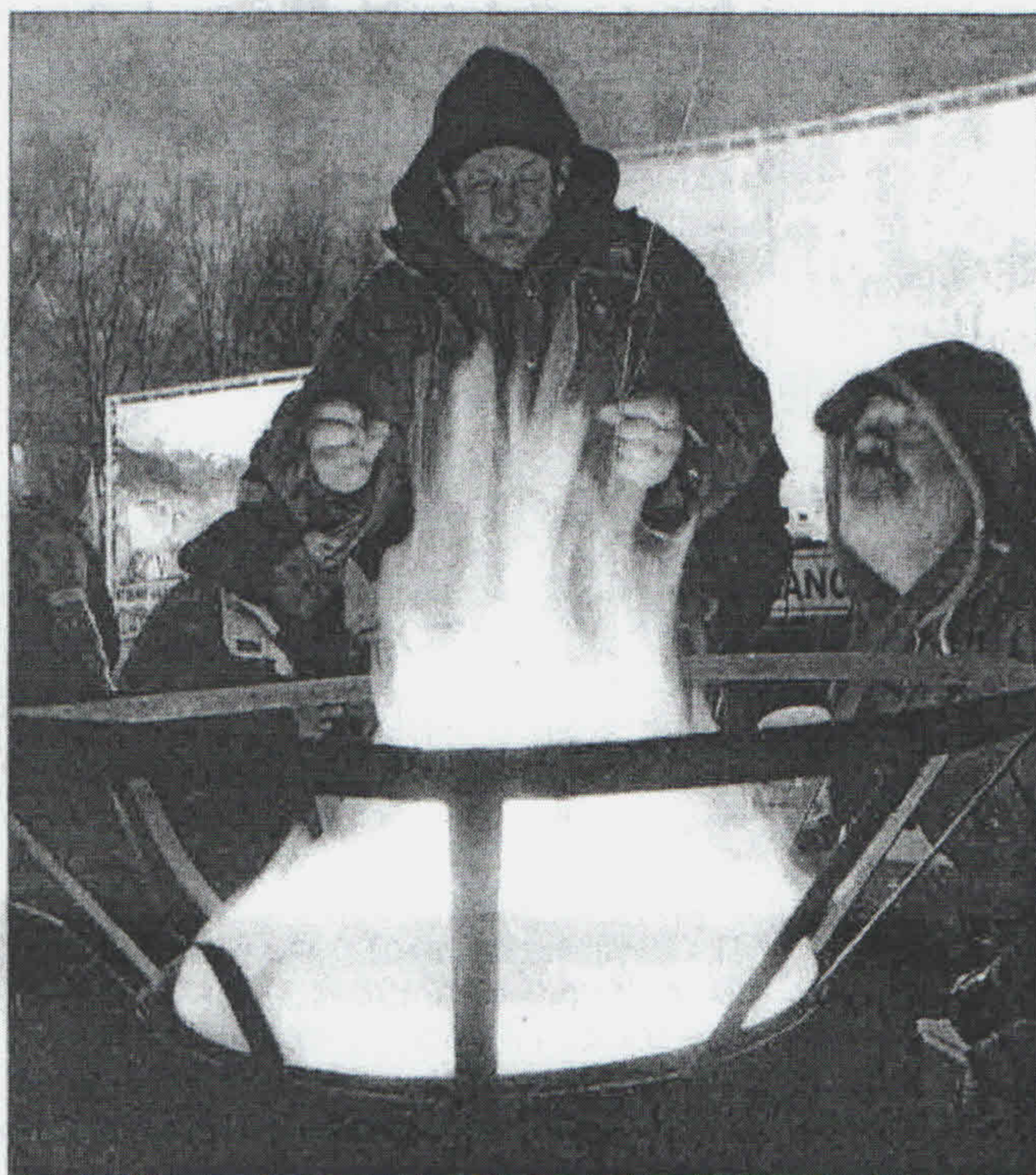
As groups of homeless and others warmed up around open fires, some sat in a tent for a free and nutritious meal.

Several dozen were lined up outside a second tent, waiting to get in to get free clothing from *Village des Valeurs*.

At night, up to 150 people were to bed down in the food tent, sleeping on the collapsed tables with blankets provided by the Salvation Army.

Various visual installations filled the square, and at 7 p.m. the circus group *Les 7 doigts de la main* entertained with their act.

The idea, organizers hope, is to humanize homelessness in “a raucous, sensual atmosphere that moves and transports you.”



JOHN KENNEY THE GAZETTE

Jean Giroux warms up at the 12th edition of *État d'urgence* last night in Place Émilie Gamelin.

On-site installations are designed to provide “a gentle sense of irony that leads to reflection.”

One example is a frozen swimming pool with lawn chairs awaiting “vacationers” in the chill of the night on Ste. Catherine St. E.

Mayor Gérald Tremblay said he’s supported the event for 10 years because it can correct misperceptions about the homeless.

“It also tells the homeless that they are not alone, that people care,” he noted.

But Tremblay was visibly

unhappy that only last week Canadian Heritage Minister James Moore’s officials informed organizers they were cutting their \$43,500 contribution – almost one-third of a \$150,000 budget.

“Why are they doing it?” Tremblay asked.

“Because of the T word in *Action terroriste socialement acceptable*,” he told *The Gazette*.

Tremblay refused to be more specific.

Because of the cutback, organizer Pierre Allard, a visual artist, says the event

might not be able to continue.

“This is irresponsible, cutting us to zero,” he said.

Officially, the group was told the event was not having enough impact for the money invested, which Allard refutes, saying “maybe up to 10,000 came last year.”

“We have 150 private companies participating in this event.”

But like Tremblay, Allard said the real reason is that the Conservative government objects to the word “terrorist” in the organizing group’s title, even though it’s an ironic statement about “socially acceptable terrorism.”

“We are artists, ecologists, working for peace. We have to be open, we have to share – that’s the beauty of freedom of speech in this country,” he said.

Allard and his wife, Annie Roy, are numbers 10 and 11 on a petition endorsed by 500 Quebec artists last March in support of the international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

Allard would not comment on whether this support may have been a factor in the federal decision to cut back.

Roy, a contemporary dancer and choreographer, said the federal cutback will leave organizers with a huge deficit.

She asked for public support at the group’s website – atsa.qc.ca – to help defray the deficit.

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