



[Comments](#) 3 | [Recommend](#) 1

# Homeless Dallas man gets second chance with new home from SoupMobile

12:00 AM CDT on Thursday, October 8, 2009

By KIM HORNER / The Dallas Morning News  
[khorne@dallasnews.com](mailto:khorne@dallasnews.com)

He was the longtime "mayor" of a village of cardboard shacks under Interstate 45.

But on Wednesday, Mack Choice became king of his own castle.

After 15 years under the bridge, the 52-year-old Choice moved into his own home thanks to the kindness of a Dallas charity.

"Mack, these are the keys to your new place. Congratulations," said David Timothy, who runs the SoupMobile, which delivers food to the homeless. "I hope you're going to be happy here."

Timothy also hopes that others will get the same chance as Choice, the first to move into his SoupMobile Village, a home for the homeless.

Choice was speechless as he walked inside the attractive northwest Dallas townhouse with hardwood floors, a new dining table and a stocked refrigerator. Tears streamed down his face when he saw the soft bed with a fluffy comforter.

"This is very, very nice. Extremely nice," said Choice, who brought nothing other than the clothes on his back. "I can't wait to cook."

The former Garland High School student said he became homeless in 1994.

As is the case with many of the homeless, Choice has had his share of troubles, including drug and alcohol abuse.

Records show he also had a rape conviction in 1979. Choice, who was 21 at the time, said he had sex with a girlfriend and only later found out she was underage.

Choice, who at the time had a previous burglary charge, served 6 1/2 years in prison.

Timothy said he was aware of Choice's criminal background and was not concerned.

"He made a mistake many years ago, but he's a good, decent person," he said. "At the SoupMobile, we believe in second chances."

Choice said a broken marriage, job loss and the death of his mother, among other problems, eventually became too

much.

"I just really gave up," said Choice, who said he has five children, most of whom he hasn't seen for years. He keeps in touch with his 33-year-old son, a local firefighter.

For years, Choice had occupied the same dirt spot next to concrete pillars about a mile south of downtown. His makeshift home was made up of large produce boxes patched together, with a thin mattress made of blankets inside.

The place, which he kept tidy, often smelled of the campfire. The constant sound of cars overhead overpowered any other sounds. His dog, a mutt named Salt and Pepper, warily surveyed any visitor.

After so many years under the bridge, Choice could tell time by the intensity of the roar from the cars above. He has seen his cardboard home torn down by police or cleanup crews so many times, he has lost count.

This year, Choice got sick of living under the bridge, where he became known as the unofficial "mayor" of the camp.

"My goal this year is to get myself back up on my feet," he said. "I'm tired of being tired. It gets old. It's not getting any easier."

Timothy, known on the streets as the "SoupMan," wanted to do more than deliver food to the needy. He had met Choice about six years ago, when he drove under the bridge to distribute peanut butter sandwiches. Choice did not give him a warm welcome.

"I was thinking, 'What do you want?' " Choice said. " 'Are you an undercover? What are you here for?' "

But gradually, the SoupMan and the "mayor" became friends.

"They don't treat you like scum or belittle anybody," Choice said of the SoupMobile staff and volunteers. "This man [Timothy], it's not just a job for him; it's his life."

Timothy, whose operation runs on a shoestring budget, decided the best way to help Choice would be to give him a job, something difficult for anyone without an address and with a felony on his record.

"I didn't have the money," Timothy said. He told one of his advisory board members, local attorney Rusty Kennard, about Choice. "Two minutes later, he said, 'It's done.' "

Kennard said he decided to sponsor Choice, paying most of his \$400-a-month salary, out of a desire to fulfill his Christian duty to help others.

Choice started work April 1 as an assistant warehouse manager, loading trucks, washing dishes and serving food.

Timothy said Choice has been one of the best employees he's ever had.

"He has an unbelievable work ethic," Timothy said. "He does not like to sit around."

It wasn't long before Choice got his first paycheck in at least a dozen years.

"Tears were in everyone's eyes," Timothy said.

Sometimes, Choice used the money to get a hotel room for a few days, where he and his girlfriend, Gina Vaughn, could clean up and get some rest.

Choice did so well that Timothy wanted to do even more for him. Timothy put his dream of opening SoupMobile Village on the fast track and made Choice its first resident.

Choice, who will pay \$1 a day in rent, said he feels a responsibility to succeed, so that others can soon follow.

"A lot of people gave up a lot of sacrifices to help others when they didn't have to," Choice said.

"My job is to not let anyone down, including myself."