

# DAILY MAGAZINE

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The Philadelphia Inquirer / CHARLES FOX

Local actress Tamarrah Carper joins volunteer Henry "T" Williams (center) and troupe member Kevin Williams in a skit.

# Depicting the destitute

*For these actors,  
homelessness is no role  
— it's dark reality.*

By Stephan Salisbury  
Inquirer Staff Writer

**T**he Biggest Chump in America, fresh from Los Angeles, serenely surveys the scene. A mugging is being re-enacted in front of him. It turns increasingly violent.

Mychael Lee-Starr, sporting black fur coat; red, pink and purple bandannas; buckskin boots; red nylon sweat pants; blue sweater, and red tie, fights off Henry "T" Williams and Keith Crawley.

Several people standing near the action scramble away as Lee-Starr goes down in a wild flurry of arms and legs. He lands with a *wham*.

"You're going to get hurt somebody mug you," says Crawley, shaking his head and turning Lee-Starr and his tousled fur coat loose. "You fight too hard, they going to bust you up and let you know. We playing, Mychael, but the real deal, they bust you up."

The *real deal*, that's what interests the Chump, who actually is John Malpede, founder and artistic director of the award-winning Los Angeles Poverty Department, or LAPD, one of the most unusual performance groups in the country. Formed in 1985, it is composed of people straight from the bottom of L.A.'s Skid Row, straight from what Malpede calls "the biggest, baddest" skid row in the country.

They have been in Philadelphia for a little  
(See LAPD on 4-C)



The Philadelphia Inquirer / SHARON J. WOHLMUTH

**Keith Crawley, a local homeless man, sits on a fire escape — one of the ways he says he spends his time on the streets.**



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**LAPD's John Malpede (center) with Crawley (left) and Henry Williams. The troupe is part of a conference on the arts and social change.**