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New faces' among homeless

nt to assist
dy Thursday
ie Armory

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v data from the city
1 downtown shelter
Lansing's homeless
m is worsening as the
my puts more people
streets.
m 2007 to 2008, the
er of people without
residences rose more

than 31 percent to 4,250, according to a city report released Tuesday.

And this calendar year, the City Rescue Mission of Lansing is expecting to finish the year with as much as a 20 percent increase in services rendered at the homeless shelter.

"I think we're seeing new faces," said Mark Criss, the mission's executive director. "I think we're filling those beds with new homeless."

On average this year, the mission has housed 90 men, women and children a day. In 2008, the average was 82 per night. In 2007, the aver-

HELPING OUT

Project Homeless Connect — a one-day, one-stop shopping opportunity for the homeless and poor — will happen from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday at the former National Guard Armory, 2500 S. Washington Ave.

age was 71 per night.

City officials blame the area's economy and a more accurate count that now folds in the volume of people served by the Mission and by the American Red Cross Mid-Michigan Chapter.

One bright note is the

number of the city's chronically homeless appears to have dwindled.

City officials define the chronically homeless as those people who were continuously homeless for a year or more or who have experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Their numbers dropped by 87 to about 660 in 2008.

"A lot of people are illiterate," said Joan Jackson Johnson, director of the city's department of Human Relations and Community Services, speaking generally about

people on the street. "They have no formal training."

Illiteracy is a key factor preventing many people from finding jobs in what has come to be a tough job market.

The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was at 15 percent in July. The Lansing area's jobless rate was at 12.7 percent in July, though local numbers are not adjusted for seasonal factors.

Unlike years ago, employers now ask potential workers to fill out job applications