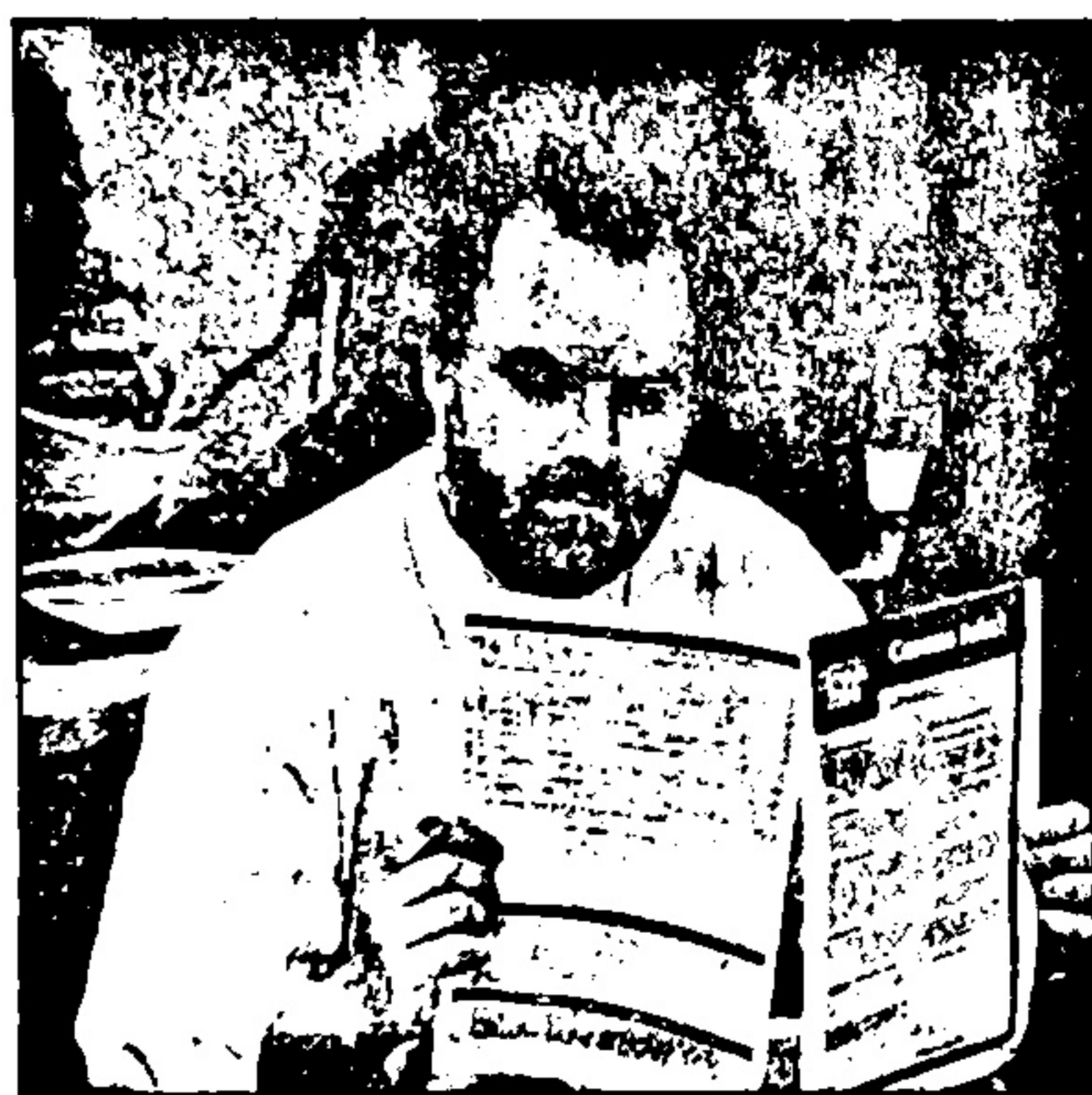




Photos by BRAD BURT/Rockford Register Star

Jim Rihi, left, explains a census test to a group of nearly 20 area residents who signed up to apply for census-taker positions for the year 2000 census. Rihi, a local census recruiter, said 600 applicants are needed by the end of February.



Rockford Register Star reporter Scott Williams reviews an application.



Sanhty Thammavongsa reviews an information sheet describing census jobs.

# Census 2000: Chance for a role that counts

▷ Continued from Page 1A

census-taker as the sort of occupation that would generate so much interest.

George Franzen, a 72-year-old salesman from Rockton, showed up with his wife, Beverly. Both applied for jobs. They are looking for a new and interesting experience, while hoping to earn a few extra bucks. George said he already does a lot of door-to-door work as a salesman.

"It's a natural for me," he said.

Our instructor, Jim Rihi, was a retired businessman who looked as comfortable as a veteran schoolteacher at the chalkboard. Rihi wore khaki slacks with dark blue suspenders over a blue denim shirt.

He explained that the job of census-taker is serious business. The results will be used in the new millennium to apportion representation in Congress and allocate federal funds for road construction and such.

Here at home, the work will pay \$9.50 an hour. The first task — checking addresses — will start in March.

An unemployed woman sitting next to me groaned loudly that she needs to find a paycheck sooner than March. At that point, I realized the job to some people means more than a chance to participate in history.

After the introductory video and paperwork (with the obliga-

## How to qualify

To become a census-taker, you must meet the following qualifications:

- At least 18 years old.
- A U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen.
- Not engaged in political activity.
- Compliance with U.S. Selective Service registration.
- Pass a written test of basic skills.

## Where to call

For information about applying and taking the test, call 636-7923 in Winnebago County or 544-0448 in Boone County.

tory two forms of identification), we got our chance at a test that was surprisingly difficult. Rihi made me promise not to divulge the specific questions.

But rather than what you might expect — "Who is the father of our country?" — these 28 questions included complex hypotheticals and challenging mathematical equations. No calculators allowed.

My group will get test results within a few weeks. If I got at least 10 answers right, I pass.

Rihi said he needs 600 quali-

fied census-takers in the Rockford area. So far, he has had fewer than 300 applicants. Nationally, the recruitment drive seeks 400,000 census-takers. The application period continues another four weeks.

Organizers fear they will have difficulty with recruitment because the country's economic prosperity has created relatively low unemployment.

But another of my co-applicants, Sanhty Thammavongsa, said he recently lost a factory job. He needs to find work fast to support a wife and child at home.

Thammavongsa, 25, was a little disappointed at how difficult the census-taker test was.

"I'm not so sure I'm going to pass," he said. "It was tough."

I left feeling optimistic that I would qualify and get my chance to join the troops hitting the street this spring. The federal government conducts a census every 10 years, usually without fanfare.

But at the turn of the century, somehow this one seems special.

The pressure also is building, with a U.S. Supreme Court ruling this week that sets out strict expectations for the census. The court ruled that formulas and samples will not be accepted as substitutes for a true head count pieced together house by house.

Wow. I guess it's not just an adventure — it's a job.