

Overflow shelters open

BY LAYLA GARMS
THE CHRONICLE

Across the city, service providers are amping up their efforts to accommodate the homeless as winter sets in.

An overflow shelter at First Baptist Church on Fifth Street opened Sunday, as temperatures dropped to below 35 degrees. The shelter is one of two sites that are expected to shelter as many as 40 homeless men and women this winter.

"Winters are particularly challenging for (homeless) people," explained Andrea Kurtz, senior director of the Housing Strategies at the United Way of Forsyth County, which administers funds for the overflow shelters. "We tend to see a lot more people in the winter."

The wintertime temperatures – and the danger that they represent for those who are exposed to the elements – make reaching each and every member of the homeless community more critical than in other times of the year, Kurtz said.

Agencies in the city typically provide overflow space from December until March to house the homeless in the harshest part of the season.

First Baptist is hosting a shelter for the first time this year, providing accommodations for up to 20 people, Kurtz said.

Rev. Russ May, the interim pastor of Bethania Moravian and co-founder of the outreach program Anthony's Plot, will oversee overflow shelter operations at First Baptist and Augsburg Lutheran Church, which is slated to open this week. Anthony's Plot, a collaborative of more than 20 congregations, advocates and community groups, utilizes relationship building as a means of reaching and helping those who need it most, May said. By contributing to the overflow effort, May is hopeful that volunteers will be compelled to take a deeper look at homelessness and what they can do – as individuals and as a community – to effect positive change.

"We want the community to become more involved in this moral and social epidemic," he declared. "An involved and aware community can put a big dent in this problem of homelessness, so we're definitely pushing towards more engagement."

In addition to meeting an essential need, the overflow shelters offer a prime opportunity for volunteers and



Photos by Layla Garms

Above: Sonjia Kurosky stands outside Samaritan Ministries.



Left: Rev. Russ May stands outside Loaves and Fishes ministry, where many overflow shelter residents go to receive food donation.

homeless advocates to reach out to members of the homeless community and help to connect them with services that could help them change their situations for the better, May said.

"People have been looking forward to this Dec. 1 date, not only because they can get out of the cold, but also because it's a first step in getting out of homelessness," he noted.

Year-round shelters work closely with overflow operations to ensure that everyone who is in need of shelter is able to find it, said Sonjia Kurosky, executive director of Samaritan Ministries, which operates a soup kitchen and a homeless shelter for men.

"All the shelters try to work cooperatively to try to make sure that nobody would be out in the cold whatsoever," Kurosky said.

The agency distributes hand warmers and winter gear, including gloves,

hats, scarves and long underwear, to their guests to help them weather the cold, Kurosky said. Staff members at the 69-bed facility often open their doors early to allow guests to get in out of the elements sooner.

"We try to be as flexible as we can, especially when the weather is fierce," she explained. "We try to be more flexible because the winter elements are harsher on everybody."

The opening of the overflow shelters is a welcome relief for year-round facilities, who are often burdened by an influx of new guests when the temperature drops, Kurosky said.

"We frequently run pretty full all year round – as do the other shelters – that's why the overflow shelters are so important," she stated. "All of us shelter providers really appreciate that because we've pretty much got our hands full all year round."

Samaritan Ministries' annual Penny Campaign fundraiser will be held on Saturday, Dec. 7 from 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. at 110 Oakwood Drive. For more information, visit www.samaritanforsyth.org. To volunteer or for more information about the overflow shelters, call 336-899-0375 or email wsnc.os@gmail.com.

New state law designed to curb vehicle thefts

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

To reduce the number of vehicles that are stolen and then sold for parts or crushed, North Carolina has enacted tougher laws that will require salvage yards and recyclers to verify vehicle information with the North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles prior to scrapping vehicles or selling parts.

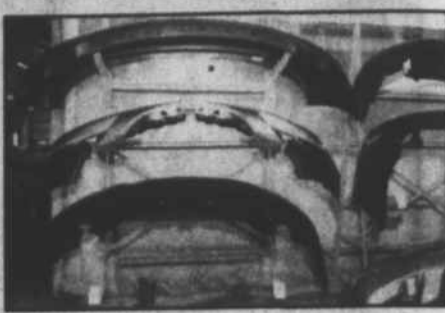
NCDMV introduced the North Carolina Scrap Vehicle Reporting System on Dec. 1. The system will allow metals recyclers and salvage yards to verify whether a vehicle brought to them without a title and more than 10 model years old has been reported stolen prior to purchase.

NCDMV will provide system access to salvage yards and metals recyclers so they can cross-reference information with DMV files. All North Carolina salvage yards and recyclers are being notified that they must register with NCID and NCDOT/DMV to access the new system and begin verifying the status of vehicles brought to them on or after Dec. 1. Because of routine weekly maintenance, the system will not be available for verifications on Sundays from 6 a.m. to noon.

If a vehicle is reported stolen, the system will notify the salvage yard or recycling business to verify the vehicle identification number and stop the purchase of the vehicle. The system will immediately notify the Division's License and Theft Bureau about the stolen vehicle and the business must also notify their local law enforcement agency. Information obtained by these businesses is available only to law enforcement agencies.

If the vehicle is not reported stolen, the system will allow the sale to continue, requiring a copy or scanned image of the seller's driver license and identifying information about the vehicles to be maintained by the business. A printable verification will be provided at the end of the transaction and the seller must print and maintain the record for two years from the date of the purchase.

The system will continue to check the vehicle's status for five days after the initial request. The metals recycler or salvage yard will not be held liable if the motor vehicle later turns out to be stolen.



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