

Challenge asks locals to spend night outdoors



A blanket and boxes are used to set the stage for the challenge.

BY CHANEL DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

Residents are being urged to ditch the comforts of their warm beds and sleep in the harsh elements for a night as part of a Bethesda Center for the Homeless campaign. Bethesda Center Executive Director Derwin Montgomery was joined by Mayor Allen Joines when he issued the challenge on Friday, Nov. 7 in Corpening Plaza. "People think they know what homelessness looks like," said Montgomery, who also represents the East Ward on the City Council. "Often times the face of homelessness are individuals that you see and work with every day or that you may see walking down the street and look just like you."



Montgomery

The Twitter-ready campaign is called #BCHSleepOutChallenge. Those who accept the challenge are being asked to spend the night in Corpening Plaza on Friday, Nov. 21. Donations of non-perishable items will be accepted during the event. The challenge asks those who want to help but do not want to sleep outside to donate \$100 to Bethesda, the city's largest provider of services for the homeless. Organizers say the challenge is based on the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, which took social media by storm in the fall and raised tens of millions of dollars for Lou Gehrig's Disease.

Joines has accepted the cash challenge because he will be unable to participate in next week's sleep-out.

"I'm challenging all of our citizens to join me in either being here on Nov. 21 or donating \$100 to the Bethesda Center," he said.

Fighting homelessness is an ongoing priority for the city, which has won praise for the success of its 10-year plan to reduce chronic homelessness. Montgomery said the city still has some ways to go before the problem is truly eradicated. The chronic homeless is a term used to describe those who have been without homes for some time. But losing a job or an economic emergency can make someone homeless at anytime.

"As the number of chronically homeless decreases, there still remains a great need for services for the homeless in our community," Montgomery said. "Every day we serve hundreds of individuals in our day shelter as well as our night shelter."

A video Montgomery recorded about the challenge has been posted to Bethesda's website, www.bethesdacenter.org, and its social media sites on Twitter and Facebook.

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