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Memorial for homeless in Middletown Friday

By Alex Gecan, The Middletown Press

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MIDDLETOWN >> City residents will remember homeless neighbors who have died over the last year at a memorial Friday evening.

City and state officials as well as representatives from local nonprofits will gather at the Church of the Holy Trinity at 4 p.m. to memorialize 17 homeless Connecticut residents who have died this year. The ceremony falls on National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day.

Ron Krom, executive director of St. Vincent de Paul Middletown, and Ann Faust, from the Middlesex County Coalition on Housing and Homelessness, will address the crowd.

“From there, we usually have one of our homeless — or past-homeless — guests come up and do a performance,” said CHC spokeswoman Eliza Cole. “The last two years we had people come up and sing ‘Silent Night.’”

After that, there will be a candle-lighting ceremony, then the reading names of the deceased.

“The people that are in attendance will actually pass around the mike and everybody will have a chance to say their name and say whether they’re homeless, or there as a guest,” said Cole. “It’s really powerful to see how many people in the room are homeless.”

Krom helps organize the nightly warming centers open throughout the city, changing locations every six weeks throughout the winter. For the next two weeks, Holy Trinity will remain as the city’s warming center, First Baptist Church at 93 Main St. opens up as the next center beginning on Jan 1.

“We have an average of about 18 every night at the warming center, but it’s not the same people every night,” said Krom. “We’ve served 87 unduplicated people so far since we’ve opened on Nov. 17.”

Krom said that, on average, around 18 people make stay each night at the warming centers, which offer heat and hot beverages.

“Most of the regulars, which I’d say there’s probably 10 or 12 people that are there every night, are literally homeless, and without that would be on the streets, and don’t have the option of a couch or something like that to go to,” said Krom. There are dozens more, he said, that have only unreliable shelter — a sofa with a friend or relative, perhaps — that use the centers periodically.

Krom said that many homeless people are coping with addiction or mental illness.

“When you’re in a position where your housing isn’t stable, whether you’re in a shelter of sleeping outside or even on the couch of a friend, it’s hard to maintain regular healthcare and take care of yourself,” said Kasey Harding, director of HIV services for the CHC. “We’re continuing to lose people because homelessness is such an issue.”

Cole said that each homeless guest at the vigil will take home a bag of necessities — toiletries, hats, socks, gloves and so on — to help ease them through the winter.

[According to the most recent data gathered by the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness](#), there were 14,266 Connecticut residents in emergency shelters or using transitional housing as recently as 2011. Of those, 470 were in Middlesex County.

The names to be read are as follows:

Michael Holt

Salvador

Paul T.

Leslie

Richard Legg

Stanley

Norman

Henry B.

Carol

Jeffrey S.

Nathaniel T.

Joseph R. and his dog, Mel

Rick M.

Thomas W.

Deborah Doyle

Steven

Tyshawn

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