

NEWSBRIEFS

Oregon's poverty rate increased in first year of recession

Oregon was one of only eight states to see its poverty rate rise during the first year of the recession, according to results of the American Community Survey released by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The survey estimated that 13.6 percent of Oregonians — more than 506,000 people — lived in poverty in 2008. That rate was significantly above Oregon's 12.9 percent poverty rate in 2007, according to Joy Margheim, policy analyst with the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

"We weren't winning the war on poverty before the economic downturn, much less now," Margheim said. "And the news will likely get worse next year, when the survey takes into account 2009, the worst period of the recession."

The ACS ranked Oregon 18th-highest among states and the District of Columbia for the share of people living below the poverty level in 2008, though Oregon's poverty rate was no different from the nation's as a whole.

Jackson County saw its child poverty rate rise from 15.4 percent to 25 percent from 2007 to 2008. Deschutes County's child poverty rate increased from 7 percent to 15.1 percent from 2007 to 2008.

The seven other states that saw an increase in poverty from 2007 to 2008 were California, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

Source: Oregon Center for Public Policy

Stimulus funds to help finance Resource Access Center

The Housing Authority of Portland has been awarded more than \$3 million in federal stimulus funds to fill a gap in financing the Resource Access Center for homeless services.

The funding, nearly \$3.3 million, comes from the competitive American Recovery and Reinvestment Act from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The \$46 million Resource Access Center is an eight-story building HAP is developing at the City of Portland's request that will provide day and night temporary shelter, permanent housing, and social services to Portland's homeless population.

The housing authority is one of 35 housing authorities nationwide to receive funds that will allow them to proceed with projects that were negatively affected by changes in the private financing market for public and affordable housing.

Including these new funds, the housing authority has received five grants totaling \$11.9 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Seattle reader writes a check after hearing of shelter cutbacks

After reading a story about cutbacks to a Seattle shelter, a reader of Street Roots' sister paper Real Change made an \$85,000 donation to keep the shelter open seven days a week.

The Lazarus Day Center, which serves people 50 years and older experiencing homelessness, was going to have to close its doors two days a week because of an \$85,000 funding deficit — money it had expected but not gotten from the county and city. Real Change reported on the story in a recent edition of its paper.

The Lazarus Day Center reported that shortly after the story ran, a woman told them she read the paper, and "called her attorney to make arrangements to write a check then and there to cover the gap, to keep the program open," said Flo Beaumon of Catholic Community Services, which runs the day shelter.

The donor wishes to remain anonymous.

Police, "Cops" intrude on St. Francis diners

STAFF REPORTS

Shortly after 5 p.m. on Sept. 10, at the height of the Thursday evening dinner at St. Francis, diners were disrupted by a slew of police and a camera crew who entered from either side of the dining hall with camera's rolling.

The camera was for the show "Cops," filming the police pursuit of a man wanted in a homicide. Staffers told the officers the man was not there, but according to people at the scene, the camera kept rolling and officers continued to question diners at the charitable meal for the homeless and poor.

The event was a traumatic experience for some diners, who did not give their permission to be filmed.

"The people were very, very agitated," said Valerie Chapman, pastoral administrator at St. Francis. "And unfortunately, there is an assumption on the part of people who are vulnerable anyway that the staff must have been in on it. So we've been mitigating this that the staff didn't know. We're trying to do the best to maintain calm. We're keeping the peace in a very awkward moment. And finding out what and why."

Although St. Francis is in the newly reconfigured Central Precinct of the Portland Police Bureau, the officers who went into St. Francis were from the North Precinct.

Calls to the North Precinct offices were returned by Mary Wheat, public information officer with the Portland Police Bureau. Wheat said that periodically they have the show "Cops" following officers and filming, and in this case, the officers received permission from someone at the door to enter St. Francis at the time they arrived with the camera crew. Chapman said she's the only one who can authorize a film crew to go into the hall.

"We would never take a film crew in

without people knowing what's going on," Chapman said. "We maintain a place where people have the dignity they deserve and that's our goal."

Wheat said that she has looked at the footage and the police have decided it will not be released for broadcast.

"None of that footage is going to be used," Wheat said. "We're very sensitive to people being concerned about it. We're not

"There is still a lot of angst. I think they (patrons) get that it wasn't the staff. On a regular basis officers do not go into St. Francis, into the dining hall. We've been thinking about, with the new precinct situation, doing some tours. We've put that on hold because we're a little concerned with how people will respond."

The man the police were looking for was not there while they were there. However,

"I'm not sure if any of the powers involved have any idea just how much damage was done just being there."

VALERIE CHAPMAN
 ST. FRANCIS PASTORAL ADMINISTRATOR

going to push something like that with the community. It's not that we feel that we did anything wrong, we're just trying to be a good partner."

But for Chapman, the damage has been done.

"I'm not sure if any of the powers involved have any idea just how much damage was done just being there," Chapman said. Chapman said the event has strained the trust developed between the diners and the staff, and also between the St. Francis community and the new officers patrolling the expanded Central Precinct area.

"I work on a regular basis with the police, meet with them and try to mitigate any issues on the campus. And I have a lot of respect with the officers with which I talk, and have a relationship with."

Chapman said she has met and talked about the incident with police at Central Precinct and with the police Neighborhood Response Team that patrols around the campus.

later, staff called police to inform them that the person was on the campus, and police took him in custody without incident. He later was released without charges, Wheat said.

"We want to create a place of sanctuary and rest for people who don't often find that," Chapman said. "At the same time we don't want to create a hiding place for criminal activity. It's a real balancing act."

Chapman, who doesn't own a television, said she learned only after the incident that the camera crew was with the show "Cops," a show she has never seen, but already has sized up.

"I'm not sure I understand a television show that can, in essence, prey on people in their worst hour or their most vulnerable moment," Chapman said.

"We understand that St. Francis was upset with it. We're sensitive to that," Wheat said. "We need to hold up our end of the bargain as do they. Our officers acted professionally and received permission to come in with the cameras."

2010 homeless census perpetuates numbers game

BY MARCUS WILLIAMS
 STREET SENSE NEWSPAPER

Thirty years after the Census Bureau's first attempt, the Obama administration is poised to grossly undercount those experiencing homelessness during the 2010 census.

Census spokesman, Michael Cook, says the bureau will repeat its caveat from 2000 that the numbers "do not provide a count of the population experiencing homelessness" and should not be construed to be one.

"But, of course, it always is (construed as one), even though they say that," responds Michael Stoops, director of community organizing at the National Coalition for the Homeless.

The National Coalition for the Homeless publicly opposed a separate homeless count in the past, fearing it would be misleading. After the last count was conducted, they lobbied for the results to be kept private.

In 2000, the census published a count of fewer than 200,000 homeless people living in shelters, less than a third of most major estimates of homelessness at any one time.

"It is easy to count the shelter population, but 42 percent of the nation's homeless are unsheltered" says Stoops, "there are a lot of people who are invisible."

In spite of the expected discrepancy between those counted and the total number that experience homelessness, the census numbers are likely to influence

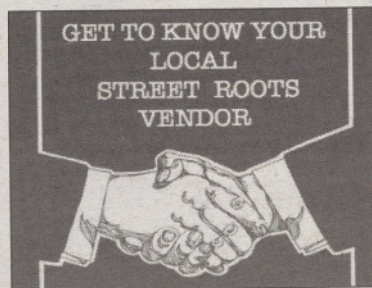
policy towards the homeless.

Census data that undercounts the homeless may be used by lawmakers to argue for a decrease in funding.

Over \$300 billion in federal funding is doled out to the states based upon the official counts, including funding for hospitals, child-care, and homeless assistance programs. Shelters, already struggling to meet demand, fear that an undercount may threaten their budgets.

Repeating most of the methods used in 2000, the 2010 census will attempt to count all of America's homeless population in one,

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