

EGAN DESPERATE FOR VOLUNTEERS

The warming center is struggling after consecutive cold nights

Ten consecutive freezing nights in Eugene earlier this month have stretched homelessness resources to a breaking point, with exhausted volunteers staying at Egan Warming Center locations night after night.

Shelley Corteville, director of Egan Warming Center, says this has been a challenging December. "I believe that's more consecutive nights than we've ever opened before," Corteville says. "It's really hard to sustain that many nights with volunteers."

Each night is made up of four different shifts at various locations, meaning each night under 30 degrees requires more than 300 volunteers to help keep the homeless out of the cold. Corteville says Egan only has about 500 consistent volunteers, so those consecutive nights are a serious strain on the center and those who help the unhoused.

"If people are trained volunteers we really need them to sign up for overnight and morning shifts," she says, adding that she expects more activation in the coming weeks. Thousands of people have gone through volunteer training, "but most of those people don't volunteer," Corteville adds.

Egan Warming Center started after Major Thomas Lawrence Egan froze to death on a cold winter night in 2008. On Dec. 18 of this year, citizens and stakeholders gathered to honor him with a memorial at the site where he died at 1st and Blair.

It's a windy, unsheltered, dead-end road next to the railroad tracks. Garbage litters the fence marked "No Trespassing." At the memorial, 30 gathered to pay respects, and pastor Dan Bryant of First Christian Church held a prayer.

"We pray not for Major Egan, for he has found his peace in your warm loving embrace," he said. "But we pray for every person without shelter who shivers in the cold. We pray here just one week before Christmas for the hundreds in our community for whom there is no place at the inn. We pray for the economic refugees in our midst who do not have and cannot get the kind of economic security needed to maintain a home and a decent quality of life."

Corteville also attended the memorial, where she asked that business leaders in the community follow the lead of Lane Community College and offer their buildings as Egan sites. "Often our folks are overlooked on the streets, people don't even want to look them in the eye. We look our guests in the eye and we treat them as guests," she said. "We're looking at a really long run coming up. We could easily surpass last year's 25 nights, and we need lots and lots and lots of volunteers."

Lane County Commissioner Pat Farr also spoke at the memorial. "We need to act today and from now on to keep people from Tom's fate, from the death that he suffered on this street that night," he said. Farr said he served in the army with Thomas Egan, and his voice broke when he asked the audience, "Why did we turn away from him?"

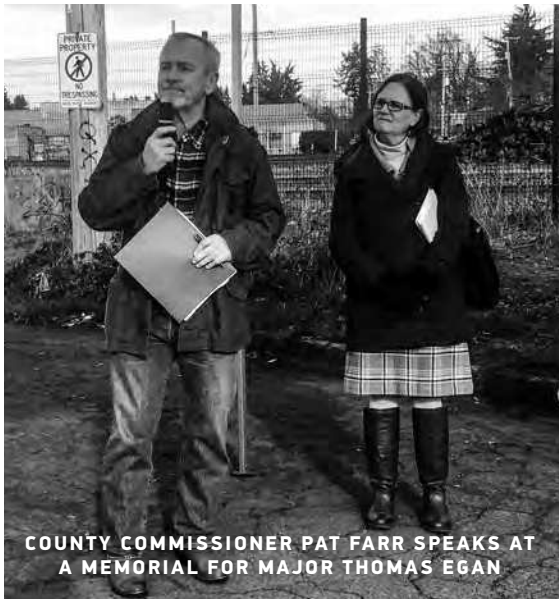
Mayor Lucy Vinis also spoke. "When Major Egan died, he stood for our failures as a society," she said. "His name represented our failure, our failure to meet the needs of our friends and neighbors and family members. And he still stands for many nameless victims of homelessness."

But, she added, "He also stands for hope. He also stands for our commitment to be a better society."

Egan Warming Center is in desperate need of volunteers, Corteville says, and she asks that anyone with the training volunteer during the next activation, especially for overnight or morning shifts.

But, she says, "Egan Warming Center is not what will fix the homeless situation. Egan Warming Center is just emergency shelter, just on nights when it's extraordinarily cold. That doesn't solve the homeless issue. It's very clear that we need public shelter."

The next Egan training is Saturday, Dec. 22 from 10am to noon at the First Christian Church in Eugene at 1166 Oak Street. ■



COUNTY COMMISSIONER PAT FARR SPEAKS AT A MEMORIAL FOR MAJOR THOMAS EGAN

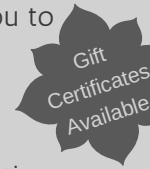
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For more information about upcoming volunteer trainings and activations, or to donate, go to eganwarmingcenter.com.



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