

HOMELESS,

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choice. It's not what someone sets out to be."

A good portion of the meeting was spent looking at definitions and statistics, as well as the general background of the issue. For example, the difference between homeless and chronically homeless was explained. Homeless means being in a place not meant for human habitation or temporary shelter, imminent risk of homelessness or fleeing domestic violence. Chronically homeless means having a documented disability and being continuously homeless for 12 months or experiencing four episodes of homelessness over a three-year period.

Different housing types (emergency shelter, transitional housing, affordable housing, permanent housing, permanent supportive housing and tenant-based rental assistance) were defined.

Statistics showed a count of 1,660 homeless in the

area in 2015, with the largest portion being 615 in Salem. There were 95 homeless people recorded in Keizer. Of the homeless on the street, 69 percent had health conditions, which included mental health, substance abuse and chronic health conditions.

Andy Wilch from Salem Housing Authority said increasing rents haven't helped matters.

"There's a scarcity of affordable housing," Wilch said. "What used to be affordable housing, there was enough in the private sector two years ago. Now the rents have gone very high in the private sector. There is new construction, but it's not affordable housing."

Craig Bazzi, Transition Services manager at Mid Willamette Valley Community Action Agency, said he's proud of the Marion County Re-entry Initiative, which helped formed the basis for the task force.

"People I deal with are a subset of the barriers," Bazzi said. "Some are incarceration and drugs. The initiative is trying to find a solution that works."

Margaret Salazar and Kristen Arnold were on hand from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to talk about options.

"These conversations are so critical," Salazar said. "Over the years federal funding has decreased to address homeless housing."

Arnold went over Housing First, an approach to quickly connect those experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry.

"It's a whole system approach," Arnold said. "This is their home, so they don't have to think about living in crisis. They can think about the future again. When they can start doing that, it makes life easier and they're more likely to engage in services because they're not in a state of emergency every day."

Keizer Mayor Cathy Clark, one of the city's five representatives on the task force, noted the next evening the large crowd meant future meetings will be held at the Keizer Civic Center.

The next meeting is set for March 29 from 4 to 6 p.m. The task force's website (<http://homelesstaskforce.net>) has a variety of documents on the issue.

There will be meetings every month the rest of the year except for April and August. At the last meeting on Dec. 1, it will be decided if the task force is done or if more meetings will be held.

Miracle of Xmas sets record

By CRAIG MURPHY
Of the Keizertimes

When it comes to a big event like the Keizer Miracle of Christmas Lights Display held each December in the Gubser neighborhood, there are things that can point to growth.

On busy nights the line of vehicles waiting to start the route of Christmas lights can stretch to Lockhaven Drive.

Another sign of growth deals with the food donation aspect of the event. After all, the event is a fundraiser for Marion-Polk Food Share, with canned food and cash donations accepted throughout the three-week run. Volunteers sign up to help with the collection every night.

Brigett Eisle, who has run the event the last few years with husband Mike, revealed some numbers from the 2015 event at the Feb. 18 Greater Gubser Neighborhood Association meeting. Rick Gaupo, president and CEO of the Food Share, was also on hand.

Eisle counted and found more than two-thirds of houses along the route were lit up.

"We had waiting lists of people wanting to participate and help out," she said. "We had to turn away 10 groups this year that wanted to help. We had so many people, we had a waiting list. If people can see what we're doing, it just brings the community together even more."

Another way Eisle knows the event is growing? She's having to buy more candy canes to pass out every year.

"We spent close to \$1,000 for 23,000 candy canes," she said. "It's fine to do that, but that's \$1,000 we don't get to give to the food bank. We're going to really explore options to get those donated or to get a business sponsor to pay for those. When we first took it



KEIZERTIMES/Craig Murphy
(From left) Mark Caillier, Jeremiah Ratliff and Brigett Eisle present a check for \$23,424.77 to Rick Gaupo on Feb. 18.

over, we bought 11,000 candy canes the first year. We ended up having to buy more, but it wasn't 10,000 more. It's growing and growing.

"The other thing that tells us it's growing is the check donation, which this year is for \$23,424.77," Eisle added. "That's the largest cash donation that we've done."

Eisle noted the 20,539 pounds of food collected this year was more than 4,000 pounds off of last year's total. However, the cash collected the previous year was \$21,837.

Eisle presented the oversized check to Gaupo with assistance from 12-year-old volunteer Jeremiah Ratliff and GGNA president Mark Caillier.

Gaupo was thankful. "First of all, just a huge thanks to you and the community," he said. "The combined total for the life of this event is more than \$300,000 and more than 300,000 pounds of food."

Gaupo called the Miracle of Christmas the largest of its kind. "I'm so into family and the community and the impact we can have together," he said. "This food drive is the biggest community-based food drive we have, hands down. That is huge. What's super impressive is the longevity of it. I love the (events) that are big and flashy.

But I would give that up every single day for something that is sustained, community building and impactful. That is what this food drive does better than any other food drive I know of."

Gaupo referred to audience member Curt McCormack as the backbone of the Keizer Community Food Bank.

"It's such a great partnership," Gaupo said. "Families come twice a week and get food assistance. That food wouldn't be there without the Marion-Polk Food Share and Marion-Polk Food Share wouldn't be there without food drives and campaigns like this. I never think of the Marion-Polk Food Share as an agent of change, I think of it as a conduit of change. You're the agent of change. You gave us \$24,000 for food. We give it to the Keizer Community Food Bank to give to the community."

Gaupo emphasized the MPFS uses what is given to it.

"We're not going to hoard the money," Gaupo said. "There's no reason to hoard it. It doesn't go into a vacuum. It goes right back into the community, the Keizer Community Food Bank and into community gardens. It all would not be possible without the community members. I'm so impressed with what you do."

City seeking volunteers for committees

The City of Keizer is soliciting applications for volunteers to serve on committees:

Keizer Points of Interest Committee: This committee was established to identify, authenticate and memorialize sites of interest located in the Keizer area. Sites to be identified may be of the historical, geographical, botanical, or unusual. The committee meets on the third Tuesday of each month at 5:30 p.m. (two vacancies).

Budget Committee: Re-

sponsibilities include assisting the City Council in the examination and analyzing of proposed budgets for the City of Keizer. The Budget Committee meets in May of each year.

Youth Liaison/Page: Opportunities are currently available to youth for service on various city committees.

Nominations are also being accepted for Volunteer of the Quarter. Please check out the city website to learn more.

Volunteer applications and

Volunteer of the Quarter nominations are available at Keizer Civic Center (930 Chemawa Road NE) or you can request an application by calling city hall at 503-390-3700. Electronic applications are available on the city website (www.keizer.org). For more information, contact Debbie Lockhart, Deputy City Recorder, at 503-856-3418.

Applications/nominations must be received by March 9 to be considered at the March 17 Volunteer Coordinating Committee meeting.

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RIVERfair VENDORS INVITED

RIVERfair, the community event, will be held at Keizer Rapids Park on Saturday, August 13.

Vendors are now being signed up for this one-day event that will benefit Keizer organizations and fund vocational scholarships for Keizer students

10' x 10' vendor space is \$75— \$50 if paid by June 1, 2016

Call 503-390-6840 or visit riverfairkeizer.com to get information or get a registration form.

RIVERfair is presented by Making Keizer Better Foundation, a non-profit organization