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increase in unsheltered homelessness, and that's a trend across the West Coast," she said.

To get numbers specific to the Siuslaw region, Siuslaw News turned to Siuslaw Outreach Services (SOS) in Florence, which focuses on a wide variety of long- and short-term help for the homeless.

"I wouldn't say our numbers are dwindling, but they did go down," SOS Executive Director Bob Teter said. "We had catalogued 936 clients that came through our doors [in 2017]. It's down this past year to 716."

The 24 percent decrease SOS is seeing is small compared to the Cold Weather Shelter. 2017 saw a steady population of guests, with nightly averages running 17 people spending the night and between 20 and 25 meals served.

But the first shelter night of 2018 saw just a handful of people. At the time, Wood said that it was still early in the season and it was possible that the word was having a hard time getting out. But since then, "I think there's eight or nine people at the church right now," Wood said as he was driving to the different pick up locations last Monday. "Most of them walked there."

Overall, Wood is seeing decreases of up to 50 percent in guests served a night.

Florence Police Commander John Pitcher said, "I'm surprised by that, to tell you the truth. I see on my off-duty and on-duty time about the same. I've not seen a reduction in people panning. We've seen people traveling through and move on and we have some that are here year-round. I have not noticed a decline. It's hard to count those numbers and identify if there's less or more."

The Helping Hands Coalition, which provides free meals to anyone in need periodically throughout the week, is also seeing a steady rate of clients, serving approximately 39 guests per day during the winter months. During the summer, the average climbs to 60 per day.

"In the winter time it always slows down," said Glen Stewart, director of Helping Hands. "In the summertime, we have a lot of

travelers, hitchhikers and hikers that come through town. Somehow they find us and come in for a meal."

Stewart reported the year to year numbers being the same, but Florence Food Share, which is located next to the New Life Lutheran Church where Helping Hands serves, has seen an increase in clients.

"I looked at a six-month period from July to December, and we had actually served more than 160 people in 2018 than we had for the same sixth month period in 2017," Florence Food Share Interim Director Ed Monks said. "So, the demand for the service was up."

However, it should be noted that the majority of clients for both Helping Hands and Florence Food Share are not homeless — they just need support to get through the month.

Overall, the numbers these organizations are seeing are as diverse as the theories as to why the numbers are fluctuating.

Possibilities

"I really don't know what's going on, it's hard to say," Teter said. "The reasons for homelessness are so vast. It's really hard to characterize it in one group. I think there's a little bit of improvement in the economy that's helping, but we still have a housing problem."

In his recent State of the City speech, Florence Mayor Joe Henry laid out some of the numbers on the current state of housing:

"We did 48 housing units in 2018; I would personally like to see us do a minimum of 100 housing units in 2019. From our recent housing analysis, we need somewhere between 200 and 500 units, so this should get us well on our way toward that goal."

Meanwhile, local nonprofits are hitting the issue head on. Programs like First Step are looking to install interim housing in the community, while others are looking to build auxiliary dwelling units (ADUs) in town for those currently in need of homes, and for the expected wave of construction workers that will help build up the community in the coming years.

Statewide, on Feb. 11, Oregon Governor Kate Brown announced

the launch of a five-year statewide housing plan to tackle homelessness and housing, with a stated goal of increasing Oregon Housing and Community Services-funded housing development in rural areas by 75 percent.

There are countless other state, county and local agencies working on alleviating the current housing problems, but many are just getting off the ground. It will be a few years until a real dent is made in housing, and Teter did not believe that any decreases in the homeless population is due to any current trend.

However, people could still be finding alternative ways to find housing in the interim.

"We do hear more people doubling up," Teter said. "More are taking people into their homes, friends and things. That may factor into it."

At Helping Hands, Stewart has been hearing multiple stories following this possibility, saying "This one guy, he said that he had been sleeping in the woods for 15 years. He was good with it because he was out there, and nobody was bothering him. He could have his time with God and was happy with it. But he got a new vision, sharing a new house with someone, and he hasn't come in for food because he moved into that house."

Wood echoed the sentiments, saying, "I think there's a real stable homeless population where they may be couch surfing or living in some other way. And they're working."

However, the organizations we spoke with were hesitant to say that's been the magic bullet for the possible decrease in homelessness. There could be other factors, such as getting the word out to people about their services.

The Cold Weather Shelter does all it can to get the word out when it opens, including social media, radio, newspaper and word of mouth.

"There's the chamber of commerce, other churches, the library," Don Koddas, the program's night manager said. "I think there needs to be more outlets to let people know who are passing through or homeless that this exists. I don't think a lot

of people know because it's so sporadic: Just when it freezes up, they put the word out."

Visibility can be a real concern for these types of organizations. In the past, Helping Hands was having difficulty getting the word out about its services, as its previous locations were just off Highway 101. It wasn't until Helping Hands was able to get a permanent spot next to food share that its numbers stabilized.

"Some of those people come in that didn't come in before," Stewart said. "They go over, get a box of food, then come over to us for a hot meal. I think that some of the people that followed us from our other locations to where we are, they'll go to food share, where they possibly weren't before. That might be one reason why their numbers are up, but I don't know."

He also posited that one of the reasons places like the Cold Weather Shelter are seeing declines may be due to people being afraid to leave their current camping positions.

"They try and stay out of sight," he said. "These poor people, they're camping in the woods and they don't build a fire because they're afraid someone will see the smoke. I really feel for them. If they're by themselves, which a lot of them are, they're afraid to leave their camp. Someone could come in and destroy it or steal it. Some of them will get a buddy, with one going into camp and the other going into town and buy some groceries or whatever, but leaving the spot for one night to stay warm in the cold weather could end up making them lose everything."

Stewart said he is also seeing some more worrying trends. He talked about three women helped last December, two of which had cars and one who was living in a trailer she could move around.

He knew the location of one of the women, but, "One of the gals has disappeared, so I don't know where she's gone. The gal with the trailer has just vanished, too. ... People migrate around. The gal with the trailer is a bit disconcerting. She was older and had been in Florence for at least two years. I just don't really know what happened to them."

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This super-simple sauce was inspired by the tarragon tang and beautiful color of green goddess dressing. It's rich yet has a bit of a bite, and highlights the briny sweetness of crab. (sunset.com)

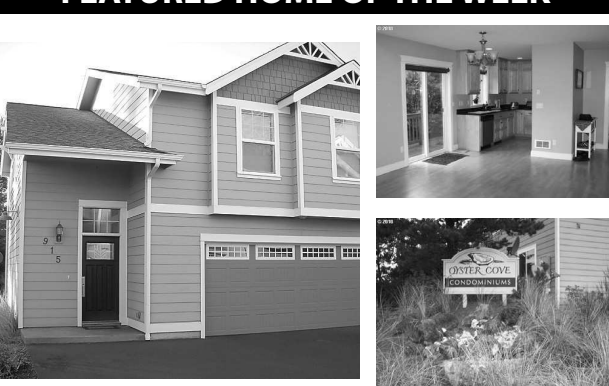
- INGREDIENTS:**
2 ripe avocados, pitted and peeled
1/2 cup olive oil
1/4 cup white wine vinegar
1/2 teaspoon salt, plus more to taste
1/2 cup finely chopped fresh chives (about 2 bunches)
1/2 cup water
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh tarragon leaves
2 Dungeness crabs, cooked, cleaned, and cracked
- Whirl avocados, olive oil, vinegar, 1/2 tsp. salt, and 1/2 cup water in a blender until smooth. Stir in chives and tarragon. Cover and let sit 30 minutes at room temperature to let flavors blend. Season sauce with salt to taste and serve with crab.

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Classes, Workshops & Events

Alcohol Ink Wine Glass Workshop with Denise Tarvin
Saturday, February 16, 2019, 2-4 pm
Learn to apply alcohol ink to wine glasses. All materials provided. Pre-registration req'd at FRAA.

NEW! Basic Leather Tooling with Tandy Leather
Saturday, February 23, 2019, 2-4 pm
Learn basic leather stamping and tooling techniques to make a leather coaster. All materials provided. Pre-registration req'd at FRAA.

Felting Classes with Ginny Kliever
Learn the art of Felting.
Felting 1, Make a coin purse, Wednesday, February 27, 1-4 pm
Felting 2, Make a soap bar and flower, Friday, March 8, 1-4 pm
Felting 3, Make a needle felted fairy or gnome, Wednesday, March 27, 1-4 pm
Pre-registration req'd at FRAA or with Ginny, 541-521-3513.

Acrylic Pour Art with Pam Nedder
Every 1st Saturday. Next one, March 2, 2019, 2-4 pm. Make your own acrylic pour painting. All materials provided. Pre-registration req'd at FRAA or w/ Pam, pam.nedder@gmail.com.

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