

Homeless

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He said he's talked with the city of Dallas and Dallas School District, as LaCreole Middle School is next door, and they've been supportive.

"What we want to do is work with veterans who either want to get back into the workforce or find permanent housing, and they just don't know how to do that part," DeMoe said. "We want to provide drug and alcohol treatment if that is needed."

Marie McCandless, Polk County's veterans' service officer, said 13 chronically homeless, 14 "couch surfing," and 21 "at-risk" veterans have contacted her office since February. She's been able to help some of them get housing outside the county.

"We can get them services, we can get them benefits, and then as soon as they leave our

county, they no longer have that support system," she said. "This facility that we are talking about is going to give them housing where their support system is."

Rita Grady, with Polk Community Development Corporation, said longer-term plans are in the works for permanent veterans housing in Independence and Dallas. A grant to build one-bedroom units in Independence has been approved, and the Polk CDC board approved buying property in Dallas for veteran's housing next to the county VSO office.

But in the meantime, DeMoe said the church is an ideal place to locate the shelter because Dallas United Methodist Church is the host for weekly James2 Kitchen meals, addiction treatment classes and parenting classes.

"If the plan takes root, part of the church would become a day center to serve the veterans with computers, and social services (organizations) that help veterans would visit the center at the church," DeMoe said. "Anybody who does something with veterans would be able to come here and help those veterans get on their feet a lot quicker."

Polk County will apply for a one-time Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs grant. While the money can't be used to buy the shelter building or any other capital expenses, it could help pay for the day center services, or other services.

He said community feedback is important to help design the shelter and respond to concerns, several of which were expressed Thursday. Neighborhood residents said they were worried about put-

ting the shelter so close to a school, as well as property values, and having volunteer training, and on-site supervision, especially at night.

Attendees also said that if the shelter opens, managers should offer community members ways to support it through donations or volunteer opportunities.

DeMoe assured those at the meeting Thursday that more information and meetings will follow.

"It's important for not only myself, and the congregation here, but for neighbors to know that we want to hear from you, if you are excited about it or if you have concerns about it," he said.

For more information: Polk County Family & Community Outreach: 503-623-9664, ext. 2118.

Polk Connect provides services

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — The Polk County Homeless Connect began in 2012 with the idea to both get an accurate count of homeless individuals in the county and to help get them into permanent housing.

Soon the event grew to include assistance for those considered "at-risk" of becoming homeless. Organizers for the event, which is Wednesday (today) from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Valley Life Center, 1795 SE Miller Ave., are taking it back to its roots: helping the unsheltered homeless.

Wednesday's event will offer medical screenings, information on benefits and housing program, bike repair, camping supplies, showers, pet care, dental care, clothing, haircuts, veteran services and more.

Last year, the point-in-time count that coincided with the event tallied 102 sheltered homeless, meaning they're living in cars or camps.

That's greatly underestimated, said Jimmy Jones, with Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Community Resource Program. Jones works with MWVCA's Arches Project serving the homeless, and presented information about Polk County's homeless population Thursday at an informational meeting for a proposed veterans' shelter. He said the number of

people living in their cars or camps in Polk County is at least 300, based on the contacts he's made and research he's done in the last year and half.

"Essentially the size of the Polk County homeless population is much larger than people have understood in the past," Jones said. "The nature of the homeless population is much more desperate than what people have generally realized in the past."

That is why the Dallas Ministerial Association and its numerous partners organizing the connect event wanted to focus on unsheltered homeless people and families.

"It's unlikely a one-day event will end someone's homeless journey, but it is highly likely that someone takes on hope and makes a connection that will actually follow through," said Heather Wright, a member of DMA and the pastor of Dallas' Living Hope City Church.

Transportation is available. **VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED:** polkconnectvolunteer@gmail.com or call 971-599-3845 for more information. Donations of sleeping bags, tents, tarps, flashlights, batteries and new underwear and socks are needed. Items can be dropped off at Valley Life Center, 1795 SE Miller Ave., or Ace Hardware in West Salem, 820 Wallace Road NW, Salem. For more information: 503-623-4116.

Music

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Dotson said the school has small class sizes and an exchange program that sends students to Japan, but few resources to offer extracurricular activities.

She started teaching music as an after-school program in

the spring of 2014, shortly after her children were old enough to attend.

"My kids had been a part of the choirs in Dallas and one of the biggest disappointments for my son was that there would be no choir," Dotson said. "I thought well, I can just

try an after-school club and see if there's an interest."

There was, and the next fall the choir was part of the regular schedule as an elective. Dotson was still a volunteer, which excused her from teacher certification requirements.

"My degree is in English

literature, not in music, but I really wanted to provide an opportunity for my kids to feel and experience the joy of singing, and singing in a group," Dotson said. "My first year was wonderful and exciting. I got a really great pianist to work with me." See polkio.com for more.

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