

60 March to Honor Homeless Who Died

The walk through Greensboro's rainy downtown streets is part of a national commemoration.

By Dioni L. Wise
Staff Writer

Almost 60 people walked Wednesday night from the Interactive Resource Center to Grace Community Church as a part of the national commemoration of homeless people who died in 2011.

But the number and names of homeless people for whom they were marching was uncertain.

"That's the thing about homelessness is that its very possible to pass away in a totally unremarked manner," said Kathy Vohs, AmeriCorps program director at The Servant Center.

At the end of the memorial walk, the marchers went into the church for the weekly Wednesday night dinner for the homeless where nine chairs sat on the stage. Each had a name taped to the back.

Linda.
Unknown.
Kenneth C.
Sharon D.
Victoria R.
Boyd R.
Wayne D.
Johnny W.
Vernon.

There's always a chair for the unknown to represent the unaccounted people who died, Vohs said.

"(Homeless people) spend a lot of time with people looking right through them," Vohs said. "They're not paying any attention to them, so this is our time to say, 'We noticed that you were and we notice that you passed, and we're going to hold this memorial for you.'"

The annual memorial walk took the marchers down Washington, Elm and Lee Streets. Mayor Robbie Perkins, City Councilwoman Marikay Abuzuaiter and AmeriCorps Staff led the group by holding a banner reading, "How many more of our citizens will die homeless on the streets of Greensboro?"

There were about 4,400 homeless individuals and families in Guilford County in 2010, said Darryl Kosciak, executive director of the Partners Ending Homelessness.

For those who died, he doesn't know if they had funerals or families to mourn over them.

For that roughly 30-minute memorial walk, the marchers covered themselves from the persistent sprinkle of rain, walked under dark bridges and jumped over large puddles and loose wires. They experienced a bit of what homeless people endure.

But as Perkins remarked, they didn't have to contend with freezing temperatures or strong winds.

Wednesday was the first night of winter and the longest night of the year, meaning that people without shelter had to struggle in the elements that much more.

Pastor Will Dungee gave a brief sermon. He urged anyone who can help the less fortunate to do so.

"To honor them," Dungee said, pointing to the nine chairs behind him, "let's make a commitment to remember to remember and to do something about it."