

## Emergency shelters to open again

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Staff Writer

GREENSBORO — Area churches once again will band together to provide emergency shelters for the homeless during the coldest winter months.

Last year, five churches and one community site provided shelters for about 100 people each night from Dec. 15 to April 1. The winter emergency — or WE — shelters were created after year-round shelters noticed a rising demand as the recession took hold.

“The need, unfortunately, has not decreased,” said the Rev. Mike Aiken, executive director of Greensboro Urban Ministry, which operates the Weaver House shelter. “It looks like there’s going to be a large overflow again because of the economy.”

The winter shelters will open two weeks earlier this year, running from Dec. 1 to April 1.

It will cost about \$125,000 to run the shelters this year if another site is added, Aiken said. But \$25,000 is in hand, left over from Operation Greensboro Cares.

The community fundraising effort late last year raised more than \$400,000 for programs that provide food or emergency shelter. Aiken said he hopes the community will step up again this year with donations to cover the remaining costs.

The money for the winter shelters pays for a full-time staff member at each site and covers some food costs, Aiken said.

The Red Cross donated about 100 cots and is prepared to do so again this year, spokeswoman Melanie McDonough said. The rest of the costs — including heat, electricity and more for food — are picked up by each site.

Churches gathered volunteers last year to staff the shelters and bring in hot meals. At Grace Community Church, the only site reserved for women, 15 churches helped support the program.

The church, in the former McIver school on West Lee Street, made room for the shelter in the former cafeteria building that serves as the church’s community room. The site had room for up to 25 women but seemed to work best with a smaller number, officials have said.

“We are hoping to pick up a second women’s shelter, but it has not been confirmed,” said Marsha Cole, who ran Grace’s shelter the first year. “I’m just praying that it comes around.”

The shelter will operate much like it did last year but with one difference, Cole said.

“We’re going to start with job and home explorations from the onset now that we basically have our toes wet and know a little bit about what to expect,” she said.

Grace helped about a dozen of its participants find a place to live after the winter shelter closed despite a late start with those issues the first year, Cole said.

“Under the circumstances, with the economy, I think it’s very good,” she said.

In all, the emergency shelters served 36 women and 132 men. Not everyone stayed the entire time.

"The wonderful thing about it: 64 percent of the people that stayed found stable housing because of the support network and friendships that were developed at those churches," Aiken said. "So it did a lot more than provide the shelter. It provided an extended family for these people."

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## **VOLUNTEER TRAINING**

7:30-9 p.m. Nov. 4 and Nov. 8: Grace Community Church, 643 W. Lee St . Call 379-1936. For those interested in working at Grace's shelter. Volunteers there also are being asked to sign up and agree to a background check through the Volunteer Center of Greensboro.

7 p.m . Nov. 10: First Presbyterian Church, 617 N. Elm St . Information and training for anyone interested in helping at any of the winter emergency shelters. Call 271-5959, Ext. 304 or 305. Ask for volunteer services.