

Free meal helps underprivileged
by Paul Johnson
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HIGH POINT – Thomas James will cherish the free community Thanksgiving season meal Sunday at Open Door Ministries, knowing he's blessed to live in a safer place and anticipate a better fate than he did during previous holidays.

The 50-year-old man, who grew up in Davidson County but now resides in High Point, battles renal disease through dialysis while waiting for a kidney transplant. But he has a place to live through the outreach of Rabbit Quarter Ministries, which helped him get out of a homeless shelter during his personal hard times.

"They actually took the time and talked with me about how I could go through their program and get housing, because I have a disability," he said.

Rabbit Quarter, founded 11 years ago, provides outreach and services to homeless people in the High Point area. Its annual Giving Thanks luncheon will be served 1-2 p.m. Sunday at Open Door Ministries, 400 N. Centennial St., near downtown. Rabbit Quarter has hosted the free community meal for about 10 years in cooperation with Open Door Ministries.

The luncheon, open to everyone, not only is an opportunity to provide a holiday meal to the underprivileged, but draw in people to thank them for their support of the ministry and educate them on the needs of the homeless, said Rabbit Quarter Director Raymond Payne.

The meal has drawn 150-200 people in the past, but Payne said attendance has increased as the economy has soured.

The number of homeless people helped on the street by Rabbit Quarter volunteers also has increased during the recession, Payne said, and the nature of the crisis is shifting.

"We're seeing a population called the 'hidden homeless' – people are doubling up and staying with relatives or friends, or people living in their motor vehicles. And we're seeing a lot of families facing homeless conditions. We're worried about the threat of people in danger of becoming homeless if something isn't done," Payne said.

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At a glance

The annual Giving Thanks free holiday meal for the community will be served from 1-2 p.m. Sunday at Open Door Ministries, 400 N. Centennial St., near downtown High Point. The meal features baked chicken, green beans, mashed potatoes, rolls, desserts and beverages.

For more information about the meal or supporting programs to help the homeless and underprivileged, call Rabbit Quarter Ministries at 885-6919.