

Homeless count sheds light on community need

Organizations opened their doors to offer services, resource referrals

By **STEPHANIE HAUGEN**
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Brad Vanvoorhis grew up in Aloha and joined the Army right out of high school, serving four years, which included a stint in the Middle East during the Gulf War. Now he's found himself homeless in Hillsboro after his drinking problem led him to lose his job. Now he's trying his best to get himself out of a rut.

Vanvoorhis was one of the homeless veterans who showed up at the Hillsboro VFW Jan. 23 as part of the "Point-in-Time Homeless Count" organized by the Washington County Community Action team.

Washington County homeless residents had several chances this past week to get a hot meal, stock up on warm clothing, receive medical services and haircuts, look into housing options — and be recognized.

As part of the program, local organizations opened their doors to the homeless, offering free food and services while they tried to get an accurate count of the county's homeless population.

The 2013 count revealed there were more than 1,100 homeless people living in Washington County. That's based on the state definition of homelessness, which has expanded to include those staying with other people due to loss of housing, economic hardships or personal safety. The number for this year wasn't available by press time.

The main PIT event on Jan. 24 at Sunrise Church in Hillsboro brought in more than 360 homeless residents.

Vanvoorhis was hoping to see what kind of clothing was offered at the Hillsboro VFW and other



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Pacific University dental hygiene students helped homeless residents at Homeless Connect in Sunrise Church.

until you see your friends again." After he came home, Vanvoorhis decided not to tell people he was in the military unless they asked, finding many didn't know how to relate to his experiences or taunted him, asking him what made him so tough.

Pete Pringle, a reintegration specialist with the Joint Transition Assistance Program, works to connect veterans with the services available to them.

"The military has such a structure," said Pringle, who served in the Navy for 23 years. "It's hard to adjust when you lose that structure and are released back into the community."

"In the military, if you make a mistake, you're punished but you're still taken care of," Vanvoorhis said. "But here it's a whole different fight. You're fighting for a place to live; for a job. You're fighting to live."

Jessie Adams of Community Action said that each year the count gets a little more accurate and adds more services. Adams helped homeless veterans get screened for any benefits for which they might qualify.

"We wanted to get together as many organizations as possible to be as effective as possible," she said.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development — the federal agency that oversees home ownership, low-income housing assistance, aid for distressed neighborhoods and

Pomeroy, a Hillsboro resident and member of the Forest Grove Elks Lodge, where another homeless count event took place Jan. 27. "But most of our homeless population goes south for the winter."

Washington County recently received a grant for more than \$40,000 from the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs to help with outreach. Vicki Horn of Washington County said they likely use the money to help with advertising on TriMet, direct mailings, and outreach at local retirement homes, senior housing complexes and other group housing units.

Amy Coplen, a dentist with Pacific University, said she sees a lot of patients with severe dental decay and gum disease and who are in pain at the Sunrise event. Unfortunately, the dental team doesn't have the resources to replace missing teeth for people at the event, which makes it hard for them to find jobs, Coplen said.

While working in a homeless shelter, Pacific School of Professional Psychology student Maris Gherita Gaulte said 95 percent of the people she worked with were homeless because of mental or medical problems, so she was there to hand out information about Pacific's psychology clinic, which focuses its efforts toward veterans, youth and low-income families, offering a sliding payment scale.

The crash, in which no one was injured, closed its facilities and it's a one-stop shop for...