

Project Homeless Connect rises at Sonrise

Dr. Karen Johnson, veterinarian for the Banfield Pet Hospital, goes over information on a pet product given to Monica Cabbage for her 4-month-old dog, Junlor.

Free services for homeless pet owners were expanded this year – the fourth for Project Homeless Connect – through a \$5,500 grant award from the Banfield Charitable Trust. The event took place Wednesday at Sonrise Church.

Michal Thompson/The Argus



By Susan Gordanler
The Argus

Sonrise Church overflowed with activity Wednesday as it hosted Washington County's fourth annual Project Homeless Connect.

The event has grown in all ways since the first one-stop service day for the homeless made its debut in the Hillsboro Armory and moved the next year to the more spacious facility of the Tualatin Hills Athletic Center on 153rd Avenue in Beaverton.

Now the event has come full circle, back to Hillsboro, but under the care of the Sonrise congregation. They most recently demonstrated

their service to the homeless community by operating their own overnight shelter at the church and promising to keep it open through Feb. 28.

The entire church facility was transformed into a "big box" store for homeless services when the doors opened for the homeless at 10 a.m., and every space was put to use — and even recycled as needed.

The room used for the kickoff briefing at 9 a.m. was quickly transformed into the clothing distribution center once speeches concluded. The guests, including leaders of countywide

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Volunteer Daniela Agostini checks information and answers questions in the services room. This was her first year to volunteer for the event "because the need is great in our community," she said, "and we're all in this together." Meanwhile, the longest lines of the day stretched into another room where people combed through piles of clothing sorted by size and gender.

Michal Thompson
The Argus

Homeless

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service organizations, stacked their own chairs while volunteers began moving in clothing through a back doorway that led to the warehouse area.

In one corner of this warehouse, kennels and large bags of pet food stood just inside a large roll-up door so visitors seeking services for their pets would not have to bring the animals through the main crowd.

One large room was set aside for access to representatives from the many organizations that could help locate permanent housing, transportation assistance, and medical and dental services. Free showers and haircuts were also available, as were three free meals during the course of the day.

Kim Marshall, of the

Good Neighbor Center, said Thursday that an official count of the number of people served is not yet available, but she estimates about 600 passed through. They were assisted by about 300 volunteers recruited by Hands-on Portland, in addition to Sonrise Church members.

As an example of needs fulfilled, Marshall said Sonrise Church had collected 350 to 400 donated sleeping bags and all were distributed. Volunteer stylists completed 117 free haircuts.

Washington County Commissioner Dick Schouten was the first to speak during the morning's kickoff meeting. He called Sonrise "the most wonderful church in the world," not because of its Gothic architecture (the church is housed in an in-

dustrial building formerly owned by Toshiba), but because it is a tremendous place for all the people getting services here today.

One day later, Marshall said this about the experience of holding the event at Sonrise: "The people felt welcomed; they felt the compassion."