

x Homeless

# South County churches open doors to homeless

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Last night was the first for a program newly come to Watsonville in which homeless people are sheltered at churches for the night — but no homeless turned up to use it.

But the program's director said he had expected a slow start, and that as homeless people learned of the program, they would probably take advantage of it this winter.

The Interfaith Satellite Program is entering its third year of operation in northern Santa Cruz County, but is just beginning in South County. Seven Watsonville-area churches and the Salvation Army will take turns offering shelter and supper to the homeless each night of the week. Another 23 churches and one synagogue from Aptos north have been involved in the program for the past three years, said Andrew Marin, the program's director.

Last winter, more than 8,000 meals and nights of shelter were provided to 500 of Santa Cruz County's homeless people, according to a press release on the program.

Money for meals served in the program is to be raised by the participating congregations. Now, as the program is getting under

way, a maximum of 15 people per night will be served in South County, Marin said. Later, as many as 30 people per night may use the shelter program.

The churches involved are St. Patrick's, Arthur Road Baptist, First Baptist, United Presbyterian, Community Lutheran, First United Methodist and the Unitarian Fellowship on Freedom Boulevard.

"Nobody showed up the first night (of Watsonville participation)," Marin said. "But we didn't do any advertising, because we wanted people to learn about the program through word of mouth."

Homeless people seeking to use the program should gather at the Salvation Army, 214 Union St., between 5:30 and 7:30 p.m. Transportation to the church will be provided.

Marin said the program is seeking a better pick-up site, one that offers shelter for the people awaiting transportation to the churches. Anyone who can offer a site is asked to call him at 427-9561.

Marin estimated the program would cost about \$6.50 per person per night. It will operate from now until March 31. A grant from the Federal Emergency Man-

agement Agency has provided some of the cost of operation.

Marin said no one had a firm estimate of how many homeless people there are in the Watsonville area.

"We haven't been able to determine the severity of homelessness in South County," he said. "One thing we do know that is different from North County, is that there are (poverty-stricken) families in constant transit among friends and relations, and sometimes spending a night on the street in their car."

Marin said, "Once we get some clients we will be better able to describe them."

The Rev. Kent Webber of United Presbyterian Church in Watsonville said in four years in the area he has never seen such good cooperation among churches as on this program.

He said there appeared to be strong enthusiasm among congregations to participate.

"People know it's a good thing. They have a sense of a deep need around here," Webber said. Personally, he said, he "thought it was good for our people to have contact with homeless persons, rather than just seeing them on TV or thinking they're all in New York City."