

# Expanded homeless center to replace church program

Homeless 2000  
10-5-06  
By SHANNA McCORD  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ—Sky-high transportation costs have forced the end of a 20-year-old program that provides the county's homeless a spot to sleep at area churches.

But the 36 total beds provided by 18 places of worship won't disappear for good.

The Homeless Services Center in Santa Cruz plans to build two dormitories at its Coral Street campus later this year to make up for the beds and services long provided by the Interfaith Satellite Shelter Program.

The dorms — one with 30 bunkbeds for men and another with 14 bunkbeds for women — are slated to be built in empty space above the center's hygiene center, which is scheduled for a \$600,000 remodel by the end of the year

with new showers, sinks, toilets and washers and dryers, said Ken Cole, executive director of the Homeless Services Center.

The hygiene center currently serves about 300 people a day, he said.

Building the dorms would be relatively cheap, about \$30,000, because most work would be done by volunteers from Habitat for Humanity, the nonprofit that helps low-income people build their own homes.

By comparison, the price of driving people to and from the Homeless Services Center and churches across the county has reached \$7,500 a month, making the program no longer affordable, Cole said.

"The cost of drivers, fuel, insurance and time is a big problem

See **HOMELESS** on **PAGE A10**

## Homeless

Continued from Page A1

with that program," Cole said. "We're unable to raise the money to cover the cost of transportation, and the churches are saying they can't make up the difference."

The majority of funding for transporting people to churches is currently covered by private donations, which have been dwindling. A small portion comes from city and county governments, Cole said.

The Interfaith Satellite Shelter Program had previously been paid for with competitive grants from the federal government administered by the state. While the grants still exist, Cole said, the number of homeless shelter programs in California in the past six years has increased, making grant approval increasingly difficult for the Santa Cruz program.

Criteria for grant eligibility now favors programs that focus on finding permanent housing for homeless rather than the temporary overnight shelter Interfaith Satellite Shelter provides, Cole said.

"The grants are more focused on outcomes and permanent housing," he said. "Our program is not designed to get people off the street permanently, only temporarily. With the criteria shift, it's harder to get funding now."

Other county programs deliver longer-term housing, such as the Page Smith Community House, Families in Transition and Pajaro Valley Shelter Services.

Demand for homeless shelter in Santa Cruz County continues to outstrip supply as an estimated 3,300 people are without a roof over their head each night, and only 1,300 beds are available, according to the latest estimates.

The number includes beds not only

for people seeking temporary shelter, but also longer-term shelter for people transitioning to permanent housing.

Providing the 44 new dormitory beds is a way to keep the county's shelter stock from dropping. Selection will be based on a waiting list.

Cole said he hopes local churches will continue their support for homeless people by sending volunteers to help serve food.

The center's dormitory project requires a special-use permit from the city Planning Department, which will be considered tonight at the Planning Commission meeting.

If approved, Cole said construction should begin by November and be completed by February.

Overnight shelter by Interfaith Satellite Shelter Program will continue to operate until the dorms are ready to open, Cole said.

Contact Shanna McCord at  
smccord@santacruzsentinel.com.