

WARMING SHELTERS ON STANDBY FOR COLD SNAP

Shelters

Volunteers needed to start on Sunday

Virginia Barreda Salem Statesman in March.

Journal USA TODAY NETWORK

Three warming shelters in Salem are scheduled to open following an anticipated drop to belowfreezing temperatures early next week — so long as they have enough volunteers.

City officials say an arctic front is expected Sunday afternoon, with a chance of snow into Monday morning.

Temperatures could plunge into the mid-20s Sunday night, lingering in the 30s Monday night into Tuesday and Wednesday, making it the coldest so far this season, according to Gregory Walsh, emergency preparedness manager with the City of Salem.

In efforts to rally volunteers, the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency announced Thursday the shelters are on standby and aim to open starting at 7 p.m. Sunday through Wednesday.

The program needs at least 19 volunteers each night to open the largest shelter at Salem First Presbyterian Church, and 41 volunteers total to open additional shelters at South Salem Friends Church and Church at the Park.

First Presbyterian at 770 Chemeketa St. NE — which holds 80 guests — has opened 21 times during the warming shelter season. The season started in November and ends

See **SHELTERS**, Page **2A**

“For most of us, the closest we get to a homeless person is stepping over them in a doorway.”

Russ Lipetzky Volunteer at warming shelter



Above: Douglas Dalke, 65, gets a cup of coffee at the opening of the warming shelter at First Christian Church on Jan. 1, 2017. ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL



Top: Volunteer Cyndi Leinassar holds the door open as a visitor enters the downstairs sanctuary at First Presbyterian Church as it is opened as a warming shelter on Dec. 20, 2017. STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

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Shelters

Continued from Page 1A

It's the primary shelter because it's centrally located and easily accessible on foot to the vulnerable population, according to Ashley Hamilton, associate program director at the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency.

Shelters are activated when temperatures hit 32 degrees or below. Coordinators receive daily reports from the City to determine activation status, Hamilton said.

Officials usually send out a 48-hour notice via social media and email to announce activation plans to gather volunteers and notify homeless guests.

Given the extreme temperatures expected to start over the weekend, coordinators sent alerts 72 hours in advance.

"We're giving a heads-up to the community with enough time to rally behind the initiative," Hamilton said.

About 280 homeless individuals have reported cases of frostbite, hypothermia or immersion foot since Oct. 2016, a consequence of exposure to extreme conditions, "We may not be able to solve homelessness overnight, but what we can do is improve quality of life and keep people alive long enough for us to help them," she said. "...Warming is merely a piece of that puzzle."

In 2017, the agency didn't open shelters until the temperatures dipped to 27 degrees or lower for three straight nights.

and OHCS have \$67,000 available to fund the shelters this winter, Jimmy Jones, executive director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency previously told the Statesman Journal.

"The community expects more from us and we want to respond to that," Jones said.

Each shelter welcomes individuals, families and pets. Clients are given a pad and blanket, as well as warm drinks like coffee, tea and hot chocolate.

Russ Lipetzky, 60, who has volunteered at the warming shelters for the past three winters, said the experience is "humbling."

"For most of us, the closest we get to a homeless person is stepping over them in a doorway," the Salem resident said. "To realize that many people are truly one paycheck or mortgage payment from being in that situation is sobering."

Here are some ways to get involved:

Volunteer

Warming shelter volunteers may work three possible shifts, Hamilton said.

The first shift is from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m.; the second is from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 a.m.; the third is from 3 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.

Those interested in volunteering can contact Volunteer Coordinator Kaylynn Gesner at kaylynn.gesner@mwvcaa.org or sign up online.

Updates

Guests wanting to check if warming shelters are open can call 503-559-7147, or the general 2-1-1 line.

Transportation

Here are some free transportation options to get to the warming shelters: Cherriots buses, mass transit: Monday-Friday, not available on the weekends or holidays. When boarding, state the warming center destination.

Yellow Cab: Monday-Friday after 9 p.m. and anytime on weekends and holidays. Contact by calling 503-362-2411. This is also available for volunteers who may not feel comfortable driving in bad weather.

Statesman Journal Reporter Natalie Pate contributed to this report.

Virginia Barreda is the Breaking News Reporter at the Statesman Journal. Contact her at vbarreda@statesmanjournal.com or 503-399-6657. Follow her on Twitter at [@vbarreda2](https://twitter.com/vbarreda2).

Volunteer Nikki Swindle waits outside of First Presbyterian Church Dec. 20, 2017, in Salem.

MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

This changed over the summer after more funding became available from Oregon Housing and Community Services. Together, the community action agency

The ARCHES day center, at 615 Commercial St NE in Salem, is open from about 8:15 a.m. until 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. When temperatures are below 40 degrees, they extend the center's hours until 5 p.m.

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CONTINUED FROM SHELTERS ON PAGE [A1](#)

Continued from Page 1A

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