

Christmas at temple

Beth Shalom synagogue hosts homeless in Winter Relief shelter program



Carlester Allen, known as Barbershop, talks Tuesday about being homeless on Christmas at the Winter Relief moveable shelter at Temple Beth Shalom in Arnold. (Joshua McKerrow/Capital Gazette)

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All was calm at Temple Beth Shalom for Christmas Day.

While many Christians spent the morning opening presents at home, congregation members of the Arnold synagogue helped feed and house the homeless Tuesday.

For seven years, Beth Shalom has helped local churches with the Winter Relief homeless program, operated by the Arundel House of Hope for the last 27 years. Each week from

Oct. 15 to March 15, the homeless spend a week in a different shelter around the county. Many residents of the program have jobs or cars, but still need a place to stay warm.

“They’re very nice people,” site coordinator Cookie Pollock said. “They’re very warm and they’re happy to tell you their stories.”

Congregation Kol Shalom helped house and feed the homeless a few days last week, its first time participating in Winter Relief. Next week, they’ll be moved to Asbury United Methodist Church.

As a Jewish congregation, Temple Beth Shalom members don’t usually celebrate Christmas. But they did help make the holiday special for the homeless.

The shelter gave movie passes to those staying with them. Monday night, one congregation member drove a van-load of residents to Asbury UMC for Christmas Eve services.

Lunchtime at the temple-turned-shelter was quiet Tuesday. The homeless napped, watched television or looked at their phones.

Carlester “Barbershop” Allen, 62, spent his third Christmas in a row at the temple.

Originally from Parole, Allen said he was born and raised at My Brother’s Keeper barbershop on West Street. Everyone knows him as “Barbershop.” Over the years, he’s watched friends find homes. He’s hoping to find a place for himself this year.

“It is what it is,” he said. “I’m just looking for somewhere to live.”

For Diane Braumann and Sarah and Juliana Goldstein, Tuesday meant starting a new tradition. The women make up three generations of the same family. They often work with animal rescue programs and donate gifts to those in need for the holidays, but have never worked with the homeless before.

While the family does celebrate Christmas, Sarah Goldstein wanted to use Tuesday to show Juliana, 8, “that not everybody’s life looks like hers.”

“I love the idea that the Anne Arundel community figures out places for the homeless to go every week,” Braumann said.

Lee Madison, 51, has been homeless on and off for about 12 years.

“It’s been mostly on in that time,” he said. “Addiction has been my issue. A lot of us in here have that same issue.”

Madison is a graphic artist who can often be seen at the Starbucks on Main Street. He said he is looking to get treatment for his addiction and made sure to stay clean for the Winter Relief program. Arundel House of Hope, which coordinates the program, screens every resident of the program for drugs and alcohol in order to secure a bed.

Madison said the Temple Beth Shalom volunteers and site coordinators are some of the nicest people he’s ever met.

“Thank God for something like this,” Madison said. “Where would the people go? This time of year it has tremendous value.”

There are three volunteers and at least one site coordinator at the shelter at all times. Site coordinators like Pollock and Laura Murray end up working 11-hour shifts on some days, coming in at 6 a.m. and not leaving until the evening.

Still, Pollock wishes she could do more for the homeless of Annapolis.

At Arundel House of Hope in Glen Burnie, there are health care and learning resources for residents to use during the day. In Annapolis, Pollock said they have to drop the homeless off at Westfield Annapolis mall or at Church Circle for the day until the shelters can house them at night.

Many of the homeless in the program are veterans, Pollock said, who aren't getting access to resources they need like help for post-traumatic stress.

The program can only help about 100 people, which Pollock said is not nearly enough. The homeless aren't seen on the streets as often as in cities like Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, but Pollock said there are camps and homeless communities in our wooded areas.

“They're all over Anne Arundel County, but they're not in the sidewalks up in your face,” she said.

While residents relaxed at lunch, Murray and Pollock were started starting to worry. The volunteers who were supposed to bring the macaroni and cheese had not shown up and couldn't be reached.

Pollock and Laura settled on warming up meatloaf made by another congregation member the night before. There would be macaroni and cheese at dinner anyhow.

While residents began to approach the table at a slow trickle, Madison was eager for lunch. The food is always top notch, he promised.

“If you don't put on weight here, something ain't right,” he said.

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