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February 21, 2008

County-wide effort seeks count of homeless people

On Jan. 29, Monmouth County Freeholder Barbara J. McMorrow joined a team of 100 volunteers and county employees at Monmouth County's 2008 Project Homeless Connect event, part of a statewide effort to obtain a snapshot of the homeless citizens. The team worked at four locations to collect information from individuals and families in need of housing and social services.

"Our goal is to offer a warm meal, a warm coat and friendly services to people," McMorrow said. "Project Homeless Connect works to end homelessness throughout the state and nation, but our county volunteers and staff are making a difference right now. They are connecting with people by offering help through various county and not-for-profit service providers. Food and coats are a great start, but we want to make sure that each person who needs and wants assistance is being helped."

According to a press release, the event gathered information about individuals who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, and offered information and services available through the county's Department of Human Services and not-for-profit organizations.

The county invited citizens without a permanent residence and who were at risk of being homeless to participate in the program at locations in Asbury Park, Freehold, Long Branch and Red Bank. The individuals were asked to fill out survey forms and were offered food, clothing and various services including free health screenings and employment services.

"This is a unified effort to reach out to people without permanent shelter," said Lynn Miller, director of the county's human services department. "While county staff gathered information at four locations, other workers collected information about people housed at emergency and transitional housing agencies and coordinated efforts with municipal representatives to locate unsheltered individuals."

One of the goals of Project Homeless Connect is to gain an accurate picture of the number of people who experience homelessness and to work toward providing them with the needed services, Miller said.

The Jan. 29 Project Homeless Connect event was part of an annual point-in-time survey of the homeless population in the New Jersey. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires that such a count of the homeless be done every two years. Information collected about the Project Homeless Connect will be available in four weeks, according to the press release.

"Several business and not-for-profit groups made considerable donations to this year's Project Homeless Connect event," McMorrow said. "I thank them all for helping reach those in need and for contributing to our caring community."

Primary donors were Burlington Mills Coat Factory, Wegmans (Manalapan and Ocean Township), Holiday Express, and the Visiting Nurses Association of Central Jersey.

The Monmouth County Division of Social Services also thanked the following: Atonement Luther



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Church in Asbury Park; St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Freehold; St. James Episcopal Church in Long Branch; CPC Behavioral Healthcare; Dunkin Donuts in Freehold; New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services; the FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties; Habitat For Humanity; I Beseech Thee; Interfaith Neighbors; Tinton Falls Library (children's items); Long Branch Concordance; Lunch Break in Red Bank; Manna House; Monmouth-Ocean Legal Services; New Jersey Youth Corps - Asbury Park; Novadebt; 180, Turning Lives Around; OCEAN Inc.; One Warm Coat; Open Door in Freehold; Salvation Army; Social Security Administration; New Jersey Department of Human Services; Patrick Weir, a student at the Thompson Middle School, Middletown; United Way of Monmouth County; USDA, Food and Nutrition Program; Various Ministries (Rev. Sue Mamchak) and Long Branch restaurants.

