



Vow to 105: 'We shall remember'

Vigil honors homeless who have died in city

By Tillie Fong

Friday, December 21, 2007

One hundred and five names were solemnly read Thursday night at a vigil in Denver to remember homeless people who died in the city in 2007.

"Help us to be mindful of these people," prayed Tom Melton, senior pastor of Greenwood Community Church. "Help us to be mindful, so we can help others."

More than 80 people gathered at the City and County Building for the 22nd annual Homeless Persons' Memorial Vigil.

Organizers said 29 women and 76 men between the ages of 20 and 77 have died this year of various causes, including exposure, vehicular accidents, violence and, most frequently, illness.

John Parvensky, president of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, said the estimated 10,000 homeless people in the state are three to four times more likely than the rest of the population to die prematurely.

Tara Wade, a caseworker for the coalition, knew seven of the dead.

Terry Pettit was found dead at East High School and Lisa Taylor died in a motel, she said. Clayton Claypool was found in an alley, while Silas Bearpaw died in a hospital.

"Just being on the streets takes a toll on their bodies," Wade said.

Mayor John Hickenlooper told attendees that a sign of a great city is how it takes care of its homeless.

"Homelessness makes no logical sense, not from an economical perspective or any moral framework," he said.

He noted that progress has been made through a number of programs, such as The Road Home, which helps homeless people get into housing.

In the past five years, he said, "we have reduced chronic homelessness by 36 percent."

For Lance Matthews, 37, of Denver, the vigil was especially poignant.

He had shouted out the name of his wife, Dawn Shackley, when the crowd was asked to call out names of other homeless people who have died.

"We shall remember," murmured the crowd after each name was added.

Matthews, who is homeless, said he was in prison for an assault charge when his wife died on the streets in October 2006.

"I missed her funeral and I missed last year's vigil," he said. "This is the first time I've been able to come and pay my respects."

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