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Vigil Honors Homeless People Who Died In 2007

By [Ray Reyes](#) of The Tampa Tribune

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TAMPA - Sixty-five candles were lit at dusk, each symbolizing the life of a homeless person extinguished this year by illness, accidents, natural causes or violence.

The youngest who died was 22, the oldest, 74. They lived in the county and called its streets home. They all deserved to be remembered and their names known, said Rayme Nuckles, the chief executive officer of the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County.

The nonprofit held its annual candlelight vigil Friday evening at Courthouse Square Park in downtown Tampa to commemorate the people coalition members called their "homeless neighbors."

One by one, each name was read aloud to a crowd that numbered about 100, and a candle was lit to commemorate the individual. Near the end of the ceremony, the flame of a large candle glowed to honor those whose names and deaths went unrecorded.

Corinne Gaertner, who volunteers at a Tampa café that caters to the homeless, could barely hold back her tears. She lost one of "our guys this year" to cancer, she said.

"He would come in every day and say, 'Hello young lady,'" Gaertner said. His name was Lee Marshall. Gaertner spoke it aloud for the crowd to hear.


Friday night's ceremony coincided with Homeless Persons' Memorial Day, which was observed in Tampa and Hillsborough County and recognized as a national event, said coalition spokeswoman Lesa Weikel.

Events such as the one held on Friday "continues to elevate the [homeless] issue into a community priority," Weikel said.

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