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# NATIONAL HOMELESS PERSONS' MEMORIAL DAY

**Organizing Manual**

**Updated: December 2015**

# December 21st

The first day of winter,  
The longest night of the year

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People in your community will die without a home this year. While we must continue to work towards a world where no life is lived or lost in homelessness, it is also important to take pause and remember our neighbors who have paid the ultimate price for our collective failure to adequately address the tragedy of homelessness.

Join us in remembrance on

## HOMELESS PERSONS' MEMORIAL DAY.

Hundreds of local organizations, advocates, and people experiencing homelessness will take pause from their work and everyday lives to honor those who have died without homes.

Organize or join a memorial event near you on our around  
December 21st!



**The National Coalition for the Homeless**  
2201 P St NW, Washington, DC 20037  
Phone: (202) 462 - 4822  
info@nationalhomeless.org  
www.nationalhomeless.org

**National Health Care for the Homeless Council**  
PO Box 60427, Nashville, TN 37206  
Phone: (615) 226 - 2292  
council@nhchc.org  
www.nhchc.org

**National Consumer Advisory Board**  
PO BOX 60427 Nashville TN 37206  
Phone: (443) 703 - 1320  
ncab@nhchc.org  
www.nhchc.org

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## Overview

Since 1990, the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) has sponsored [National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day](#) every year on December 21st, the first day of winter and longest night of the year, to bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness and to remember those who have died while living without a permanent home. Beginning in 2005, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council and the National Consumer Advisory Board joined NCH as co-sponsors of this meaningful event.

In an effort to maximize the impact of the day, we encourage local and statewide organizations to hold memorials for those who have died homeless in their communities. In past years hundreds of people have gathered in cities throughout the country to honor people who have died while living without a permanent home. In 2014, we are aware of over 100 cities, representing 39 states and the District of Columbia that held memorial days to remember people experiencing homelessness who have lost their lives.

## What You Can Do

1. Get involved with an event in your city. If you are unaware of an event taking place, contact us and we will help you connect with one.
2. If an event is not already taking place, organize your own event with local partners and persons experiencing homelessness. Examples of past events can be found on page 5.
3. Work with your local government to get December 21 declared as Homeless Persons' Memorial Day.
4. Engage the public through traditional and social media to raise awareness of Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. Examples of how you can engage through media can be found on page 6.

## Resources

This manual should serve as a resource to assist you in your efforts. If you have any additional questions or want to let us know about your event, please visit

[www.nhchc.org/resources/consumer/homeless-persons-memorial-day/](http://www.nhchc.org/resources/consumer/homeless-persons-memorial-day/) or contact:

National Coalition for the Homeless  
(202) 462 - 4822  
[info@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:info@nationalhomeless.org)

Katherine Cavanaugh  
National Health Care for the Homeless Council  
(443) 703 - 1320  
[kcavanaugh@nhchc.org](mailto:kcavanaugh@nhchc.org)

***If this will be your first time participating in Homeless Persons' Memorial Day, remember that it is a personal event for you and your community. You have total freedom to honor the lives of those who passed away while experiencing homelessness in the manner that you see is most appropriate. This guide is meant to give you ideas and provide resources, not dictate the design of your event.***

# Planning Your Event

## Working with Your Community

Invite other organizations to participate in planning the event. Local and statewide coalitions for the homeless, health care for the homeless projects, shelters, housing programs, service providers and outreach programs may all wish to participate. People who have experienced homelessness or who still have no homes should be incorporated into these events at every stage.

Make sure to tailor your local event to your own community. Think creatively about ways to honor the memory of those who have died and ways to raise awareness about homelessness. Past events have included:

- Candlelight vigils
- Graveside services
- Plays and performances
- Silent Marches
- Special Religious Services
- Public policy advocacy events

Each of these events will look differently and require different preparations, but a basic checklist of organizing tasks for your events includes:

- Build or join a coalition with local partners and people experiencing homelessness.
- Decide upon the date, time, and location. Be sure to pay attention to any requirements like getting a permit and other logistics. (Events on or around December 21st are recommended.)
- Create an agenda and choose speakers accordingly. Having persons who have experienced homelessness speak on behalf of their experience is important.
- Gather names of homeless individuals who have died in the last year. This information can be gathered from a variety of sources including service providers, the local medical examiner, hospitals, and the homeless community.
- Market the event through fliers, press release, and social and traditional media.

*All organizers are encouraged to include a name reading and identify the number of people who have died while homeless in the local area. Try to obtain the names and ages of each person. A name-reading not only honors those whose lives have been lost, but it can be a powerful component of your ceremony that connects the person to the tragedy of homelessness.*

## Working with your Local Government

In order to attract more attention to this year's Memorial Day, work with your local city council, mayor, state legislature, or governor. Encourage them to pass a proclamation or resolution that recognizes December 21st as [National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day](#) and describe homelessness as a continuing and serious issue that must be resolved. A sample resolution has been included in this manual. You are encouraged to modify it to best meet the needs of your community.

## Working with the Media

Media coverage of homelessness usually reaches its peak at the beginning of winter and the holiday season. Make sure you publicize your event on social media and encourage local press to promote and cover your event. Each group should:

- Make and circulate a flyer that includes important information about your event including time and place (example on page 8).
- Update your organizational and personal social media pages and website to promote the event.
  - Use [#homelessmemorial](#) to connect with others honoring this day!
- Write and submit a press release announcing your event to local media (example on page 11).
- Write and submit an article or letter-to-the-editor for your local newspaper (example on page 14).
- Invite local media to your event, if the group feels comfortable doing so.

Media coverage is a great tool to bring attention to governmental policies, or lack thereof, which can be a contributing factor to the homelessness in your area. Materials regarding current policy issues are available at [www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org) and [www.nhchc.org](http://www.nhchc.org).

## Working with Us

We would love to hear about your event so we can help promote it as well as demonstrate to others what else is happening throughout the country. Please contact the National Coalition for the Homeless ([info@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:info@nationalhomeless.org)) or Katherine Cavanaugh ([kcavanaugh@nhchc.org](mailto:kcavanaugh@nhchc.org)) with the following information:

- A description of your event
- The number of homeless people who have died in your community
- Photographs following the event

## Questions to Consider

When organizing an event for the first time it is easy to forget to cover all of your bases. Below are some questions you may want to consider:

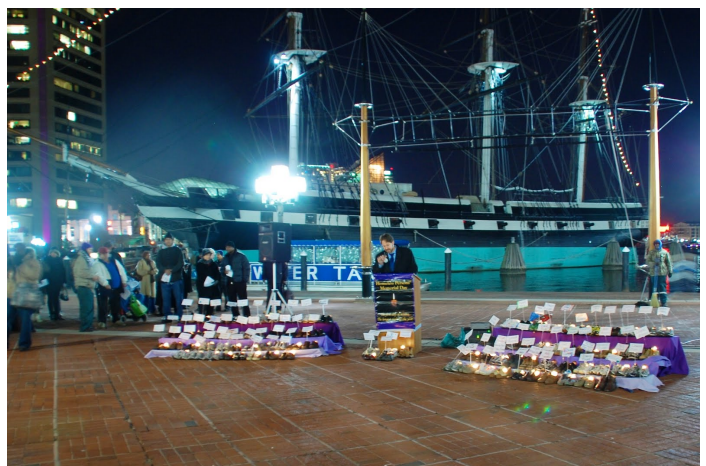
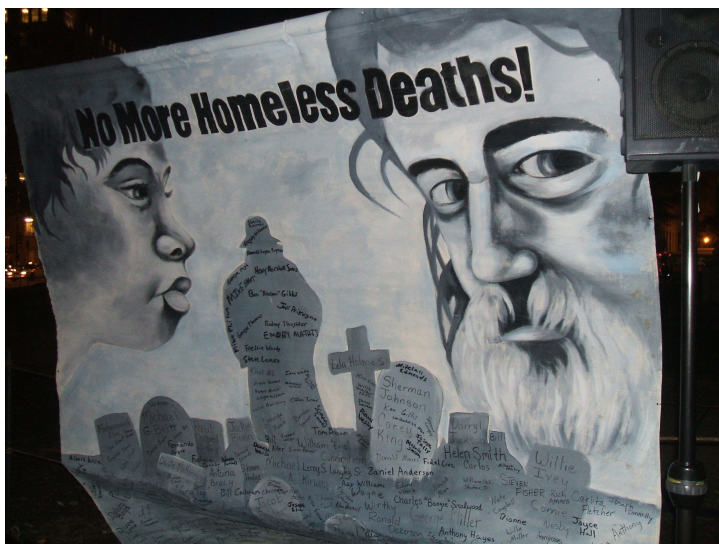
- What other groups might want to get involved?
- What type of event do you want to hold?
- Where do you want to hold the event? Is a permit required?
- How will you gather the names of and other information of the deceased?
- How will you market the event/direct people to get involved?
- What form of media coverage is most effective?
- Who will promote the event? To whom will the event be promoted?
- How can you make this easier to organize the event next year?

## Advocacy Recommendations for Homeless Person's Memorial Day

While Homeless Persons' Memorial Day is a solemn occasion to remember those who have passed, we recommend that local groups conducting HPMD events use these opportunities to encourage changes in their community so that no others should die on the streets. Consider addressing some or all of the following policy priorities, or add others depending on current local issues:

1. Housing is a fundamental need, a basic human right, and protects people from illness, violence and death.
  - a. Local, state and federal governments should invest in affordable housing for all its residents, to include those at the lowest income levels.
  - b. Housing must not be contingent on personal characteristics or choices, and should be provided in a "Housing First" approach.
  - c. Adequate supports to maintain housing (as in Permanent Supportive Housing) should be available to those who need them in order to prevent homelessness.
2. State and local jurisdictions should declare formal States of Emergency to create additional resources for housing and services as well as more quickly facilitate zoning changes and other administrative actions needed to end homelessness.
3. Medical illnesses often go untreated for lack of accessible, affordable health care, and result in accelerated death rates and premature mortality for people without homes.
  - a. States that have not yet expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act must do so in order to facilitate the breadth of health care services for this population (who are often uninsured).
  - b. States and the federal governments should move toward single payer health care financing – expanded and improved Medicare for all – to eliminate remaining coverage gaps and financial barriers.
4. Alcohol-related illnesses and drug overdoses are among the leading causes of death for people experiencing homelessness.
  - a. States and local communities should ensure there is adequate capacity to provide substance abuse treatment for those who need it, to include intensive, residential programs.
  - b. Harm reduction programs – including ready availability of naloxone, needle exchange, and safe injection sites – should be implemented.
5. People without homes are frequent victims of violence, which is sometimes fatal.
  - a. Jurisdictions should not pass laws that criminalize homelessness because arrests and displacement do nothing to solve the problem.
  - b. Law enforcement should focus on protecting vulnerable people, rather than on enforcing ordinances intended to limit their presence in public spaces.
6. Local jurisdictions should track, investigate and provide annual reports on all homeless deaths, and use the information to improve public policies and targeted interventions.
  - a. Death certificates should identify people who die while experiencing homelessness to provide better data on the extent of these tragedies.

# Photos from Past Homeless Persons' Memorial Day Events:





# Homeless Memorial Day



**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21ST  
4:00 PM  
IN FRONT OF THE STATE HOUSE  
CONCORD, NH**

## **PLEASE JOIN US**

***TAKE A FEW MOMENTS TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO HAVE DIED FROM HOMELESSNESS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE***

For more information, contact:  
Maggie Fogarty, American Friends Service Committee  
(603) 224-2407  
mfogarty@afsc.org

**Please bring a candle for the vigil and a food item for the Friendly Kitchen**

## Sample Program - Outside Pages

Welcome to the Ninth Annual Homeless Persons' Memorial Day Service in Central Florida.

This service commemorates the lives of the homeless members of our community who died. Participants will join community groups, service providers and individuals in more than 175 cities across the United States who are holding their own services today.

This candlelight service is held on December 21st, the first day of winter and the longest night of the year. Our goal is to commemorate the lives of the mothers or fathers, sons or daughters who died on our streets or in our emergency shelters from illness or conditions directly related to their homelessness. In many cases, this service will be the only commemoration of their lives.

In Seminole, Orange and Osceola Counties, 33 people lost their lives while homeless. Advocates, friends, community leaders and service providers hope to bring attention to the need for more resources to provide affordable housing, emergency shelter and medical care for our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you for attending this service. For more information about how you can help end homelessness, contact

Homeless Services Network  
of Central Florida  
[www.hsncfl.org](http://www.hsncfl.org)  
(407) 893-0133

# HOMELESS PERSONS' MEMORIAL DAY

December 21st  
9:00 a.m.

**A ceremony to commemorate the  
lives of the homeless members  
of our community  
who died this past year**

Sponsored by



Hosted by  
**First Presbyterian Church**  
106 E. Church Street  
Orlando, FL 32801

## Sample Program - Inside Pages

### MEMORIAL SERVICE

#### **Opening Prayer**

Pastor Case Thorp  
First Presbyterian Church of Orlando

#### **Welcome**

Cathy Jackson  
Homeless Services Network of Central Florida

#### **Proclamation from the City of Orlando**

Alana Brenner  
City Clerk

#### **Eulogy**

Robert Stuart  
Commissioner, City of Orlando

#### **Reading of the Names**

Bakari Burns  
Chairman of the Board, Homeless Services  
Network

#### **Jackie Dowd Remembers**

George Crossley

#### **Co-workers Remember**

Steve "Rocky" Cook

#### **Musical Selection/ Poetry**

#### **Closing Prayer (Candle Lighting)**

Pastor Case Thorp  
First Presbyterian Church

### THOSE WE HONOR

*Adrian Acevedo  
Connie Asbury  
Teri Lee Brookshire  
Albert Capps  
William Phillip Capps  
Steve "Rocky" Cook  
George Crossley  
Brenda Davis  
David Dotterer  
Jonathon Wayne Duck  
James Evans  
James Fisher  
Arturo Miguel Garcia  
Timothy Giedlin  
Jay Girard  
David Glenn  
Lois Ann Gyermoti  
Keith Hess (known as Stacey)  
Heide Hewett  
David Hills  
"J.R."  
Bernard King  
Daniel Martin Jacobs (known as Chief)  
Alan Martin  
Joe Mitchell  
Gerald Ramsey  
Susan Roa  
John Robicheaux  
Michael Self  
Phillip Tanner  
Jerry L. Thomas  
Sherry Tyner  
Bradley Watson  
John Handzlik  
(known as Mohawk)  
Wendell Wright  
Heather Young*



HSN thanks the First Presbyterian Church of Orlando  
for hosting this memorial service.

## Sample News Release

ATTENTION LOCAL MEDIA  
November 1, 2014

Contact: (Your Name)  
(Local Group Name)

Philadelphians To Honor Homeless Persons Who Have Died, Call for an End to Homelessness

PHILADELPHIA, PA — Hundreds of Philadelphians will gather to remember those homeless and formerly homeless Philadelphians who died and call for an end to homelessness. Homeless Person's Memorial Day, an annual event commemorated in over 150 cities and counties across the United States on the first day of winter, will also be a call to action to end homelessness in our city and our nation. Speakers will include well-known homeless advocate Sister Mary Scullion, Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell, as well as local religious leaders and several formerly homeless persons. Building on the theme of "Remember, Hope, and Heal," the event will feature a ceremonial reading of the names of more than 85 persons, homeless and formerly homeless, who died in the past year. The event is open to the public.

**WHO:** Homeless advocates, service providers, homeless and formerly homeless persons, religious leader, concerned citizens, city representatives... and YOU.

**WHAT:** Homeless Memorial Day candlelight vigil, performances, and call to action

**WHERE:** LOVE Park at the corner of 15th Street & JFK Boulevard

**WHEN:** Saturday, December 21st, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Advocates, service providers, homeless and formerly homeless people, religious leaders, and concerned citizens will honor the lives and dreams of homeless men and women who died this year in Philadelphia and will renew their commitment to end homelessness. More than 85 homeless and formerly homeless persons who lost their lives this year will be remembered.

Since 1990, the National Coalition for the Homeless has sponsored National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day on the first day of winter to bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness and to remember our homeless citizens who have paid the ultimate price for our nation's failure to address the issue.

Organizers of this year's event are calling attention to this time of economic hardship for many Americans: "Unemployment and poverty are increasing, foreclosures continue at a record rate, and shelters and food pantries cannot meet the increased demand," said Sister Mary Scullion, one of the speakers on Tuesday. "We use this occasion to call on all Philadelphians and all Americans to wake up and recommit ourselves to ending homelessness. While we seek economic solutions for our country, we cannot forget our most vulnerable citizens."

More information and background information on National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day are available at <http://www.nhchc.org/memorialday.html> and [www.projecthome.org](http://www.projecthome.org).

Sample Proclamation



**PROCLAMATION**

- WHEREAS,** THE WINTER POSES EXTREME HARDSHIP FOR UNSHELTERED AND INADEQUATELY HOUSED LOW-INCOME MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN IN DES MOINES; AND
- WHEREAS,** THE SPIRIT OF THE HOLIDAY SEASON OF GIVING PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR AFFIRMATION AND RENEWAL REGARDING THE COMMITMENT TO END HOMELESSNESS; AND
- WHEREAS,** DECEMBER 21<sup>ST</sup> HAS BEEN DESIGNATED NATIONAL HOMELESS PERSONS' MEMORIAL DAY BY THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS AND THE NATIONAL HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS COUNCIL AND IS SO RECOGNIZED BY CITIES NATIONWIDE; AND
- WHEREAS,** JOPPA OUTREACH SERVES POLK COUNTY'S UNSHELTERED RESIDENTS LIVING IN TENTS, UNDER BRIDGES AND IN VEHICLES AND ORGANIZES THE IOWA HOMELESS MEMORIAL EACH YEAR TO HELP RAISE AWARENESS; AND
- WHEREAS,** IN THIS SEASON OF GENEROSITY AND SHARING, CITIZENS OF DES MOINES ARE ENCOURAGED TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO PROMOTING COMPASSION AND CONCERN FOR ALL BROTHERS AND SISTERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE POOR AND HOMELESS; AND
- WHEREAS,** IN REMEMBERING THOSE WHO HAVE DIED ON THE STREETS, THE CAUSE OF ENDING HOMELESSNESS IS KEPT URGENT AS IS THE CITY'S COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT TO PREVENTING SUCH DEATHS IN THE FUTURE.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, T. M. FRANKLIN COWNIE, ON BEHALF OF THE CITY COUNCIL AND THE CITIZENS OF DES MOINES, DO HEREBY PROCLAIM SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2014, AS:

**NATIONAL HOMELESS PERSONS' MEMORIAL DAY**

IN RECOGNITION OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIED HOMELESS IN AND AROUND DES MOINES, WE HEREBY ASK ALL CITIZENS TO TAKE A MOMENT OF SILENCE IN REMEMBRANCE AND ENCOURAGE OUR CITIZENS TO SUPPORT ALL LOCAL EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE HOMELESSNESS IN OUR COMMUNITY.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I HAVE HEREUNTO SET MY HAND AND CAUSED THE SEAL OF THE CITY OF DES MOINES, IOWA TO BE AFFIXED THIS EIGHTH DAY OF DECEMBER, TWO THOUSAND FOURTEEN.

**T. M. FRANKLIN COWNIE, MAYOR  
CITY OF DES MOINES**



## Sample City/County Resolution

### **Greensboro City Council Resolution Designating December 21st as National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day.**

WHEREAS, December 21, 2014 marks the first day of winter and is the longest night of the year;

WHEREAS, the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council have designated December 21, 2014 as National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day;

WHEREAS, in the season of generosity and sharing, citizens of Greensboro are encouraged to commit themselves to promoting compassion and concern for all, particularly during the winter months that pose extreme hardships for Greensboro citizens who are less fortunate and without homes;

WHEREAS, hunger and homelessness continue to be a serious challenge for many Greensboro citizens who have the right to adequate food, housing, clothing, safety and health care;

WHEREAS, homelessness raises one's risk of illness, injury and death;

WHEREAS, the Homeless Memorial Walk of Remembrance will take place in Greensboro on Wednesday, December 17, 2014 to honor those who have passed away in 2014 as a result of homelessness;

WHEREAS, by joining together and remembering our neighbors, we can honor their lives by working to provide solutions to end homelessness within the City.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF GREENSBORO:

That December 21, 2014 is hereby named National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day in Greensboro to remember those who have died homeless and to encourage citizens to come together to celebrate their lives by working to resolve the factors that lead to homelessness within the City.

## Sample Article

### Saying Good-Bye: A Story about Loss in a Shelter

*By: Barbara Anderson, director, Haven House Services, Jeffersonville, IN, and NCH Board Member*

Charles “Cash” Brown. Cash was the first person to ever die in the shelter. He had pancreatic cancer and said that the shelter was his home and it was his right to stay there. At first we including his daughter tried to hospitalize him, but he refused, adamantly. The staff and residents cared for him, as they would a family member, and he died 10 minutes before the ambulance arrived, that forced him to go to the hospital via a court order his daughter finally won. His daughter called us two months after his cremation and asked that his ashes be buried under the Japanese Elm in the front of the shelter. There are now six trees there. A plaque, donated by a local memorial company, bears their names. She said her father felt at home there for the first time in a long time and it meant something to him. He was an African American Vietnam Veteran, played in several bands, and retired from the Jefferson County Public School System as a maintenance man. They visit him and us, both she and her brother.

Jonelle Akers was our oldest in age, at 75, and our oldest in time at the shelter. She was a paranoid schizo-phrenic who I found sitting in the rain in 2006. We fought endlessly with the mental health system to get her placed but they said she was “lucid” and couldn’t help her. She played the piano beautifully, cussed like a sailor, and looked over the children as if they were her own, while her own would not even claim her body. She too is under the tree.

Mike Kahafer was a Vietnam Veteran as well. He had constant pain and was a great guy, when he wasn’t clouded over by the pain medication. His smile was the most infectious thing; you had to smile when he did smile on those rare occasions. His eyes were brilliantly blue, and he was a quiet man who really just wanted to get along. He died from heart failure after taking too much of his medication. He did not commit suicide, but was just trying to kill the pain.

Tommy Rawlings was an older man who drove his moped around town like a religion. He was struck by a car and died after 10 days. Tommy was a friendly, optimistic man. He didn’t let anything stop him and just loved to ride his moped. There is a video about him on Facebook saying he didn’t get hugs as a child, and until he became homeless he didn’t feel loved. Once he entered homelessness he found an abundance of hugs. It was an odd statement because he felt more loved as a homeless man than a housed child.

“Cincinnati” John Anderson was an older man, a veteran, devoted to his deceased wife, Mary. They were nomadic in lifestyle and I really thought when Mary died two years ago that John would settle in and finally become housed because he had a substantial monthly income from veteran’s and social security. He did not. His nickname came from the travels at the first of the month to Cincinnati to get his money. He would come back around the third week of the month dead broke and stay for two weeks.

The cycle was repeated monthly for as long as I have known him and that was about 25 years. He had dancing blue eyes and loved to spin a story. He never lived without his drink and would not even ask to come to shelter because he knew he couldn't bring a drink. He would tease me and say, "Someday you are going to let it rip and we will party at the shelter all night long."

Jean Ruel died at 57. She worked for me as a VISTA volunteer for 3 years when we first started the shelter. Once her VISTA time was up she worked for us until she felt she couldn't work anymore. Her back and chronic pain was taking its toll on her body. That was 10 years ago, and since that time, a healthy robust woman became an emaciated shell of her former self. The pain medication she was taking became something she couldn't control. She eventually became homeless herself and entered our shelter for the fourth and final time, three months ago. She thrived. It was almost like having the old Jean back. Her humor was contagious, her daughter had come with her, and Jean was devoted to her, who is now a young adult. Jean got sick right after Christmas, so her name wasn't mentioned at the Memorial, but we lost her on Dec. 29, 2012. We would want her remembered.

"Old Nick" was an older gentleman who took care of the other street guys in Louisville. Being one of the oldest and longest to live on the streets, he knew them well and would mentor the guys. While he would look out for them, they would look out for him in return. When he died in his tent, it was after many had taken care of him. He had been called their "daddy".

It was a tough year. You fight many battles to serve folks but this one is one you don't win. When you bury someone in homelessness you find yourself feeling the loneliness as well. We don't believe anyone should die without someone knowing or caring, each of our folks received a celebration of life.