

The cold snap causes a scramble at shelters.txt

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HIGH POINT - Still bundled in hooded jackets, dozens of men circled the lobby of High Point's Open Door Ministries on Tuesday night.

They sat and waited, looking to claim a hot meal and a warm bed for a long chilly night.

Reginald McDougale, the shelter director, said the lobby was packed by 4:30 p.m., and a line of men looking for assistance stretched out the door.

"They have been coming in from everywhere," he said of the men, who ranged in age from 18 to 78.

"This is the first time it's gotten this cold this quick in my 12 years here," McDougale said. "We are going to start putting them where we can stick them."

Below-freezing temperatures came a little early to Guilford County this year, swelling the ranks at some shelters and giving new urgency to a plan to increase emergency housing for the homeless.

Temperatures were expected to dip into the mid-20s overnight Tuesday, about 10 degrees lower than usual for this time of the year.

Workers at Open Door Ministries spent the afternoon getting ready, pulling down extra mattresses to create beds to accommodate more than 100 people. The shelter typically houses 88.

"This is the place to stay warm," said Juan Milan, who has been staying at the ministry for three days this week, while seeking help finding a job. "If I wasn't here, I would be under a bridge covered up in cardboard or sleeping in my car."

Greensboro Urban Ministry's Weaver House made plans for more than 35 additional people Tuesday night, said Venetia Leak, an evening supervisor. The center typically accommodates about 100 people.

"We have been doing (extra) overnights since three weeks ago, since it's been cold," Leak said. "We ran out of cots to give people (Monday night)."

Meanwhile, homeless advocates in Greensboro planned to meet again Friday and Monday to work toward expanding emergency shelter space this winter. Officials expect to need an additional 60 to 100 beds to house a growing number of homeless people.

"We're trying to get this thing up and running," said Marshall Benbow, director of outreach at Grace Community Church. "But obviously, with the cold snap, it's not happening fast enough."

Grace Community has offered its West Lee Street building, which could house about 30 people, to expand the overflow space.

The Greensboro Salvation Army's Center of Hope hasn't opened its emergency overflow yet.

The shelter houses about 100 people, but adds 55 to 65 additional spaces during the

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coldest months, typically in mid- to late December.

The shelter sometimes opens its overflow early, if Urban Ministry runs out of space, said Maj. Paul Egan.

"If it gets beyond what they are able to take care of, we may look to do something more," he said. "But that would take a lot of jockeying." Additional personnel need to be trained, and those volunteers aren't lined up yet, Egan said.

The Salvation Army has offered to create more overflow this winter at its Aycock Street center, which could potentially add 30 spots.

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