

10
TOP
THINGS TO DO
THIS WEEK
DEALS

1 All week: See a museum for free

CULTURE PASS

Get free admission for two to four people to participating Valley attractions, including the Heard Museum. Check out a pass to a particular venue at your local library. The number of passes are limited; they are available on a first-come, first-served basis and cannot be renewed. Once you check out a pass, you have seven days to use it. showup.com.

2 Today: Weekend sale

SAFeway

Get ready for backyard grilling and football-watching with these grocery deals. Save \$1 per pound on pork-loin back ribs, now \$2.99 a pound. Get 2 1/2 pounds of chicken wings for \$6.99, a \$1 savings. Save up to \$10.11 on a 30-can case of Bud, Miller, Coors or Tecate, \$16.88 (limit two). Prices good through Monday with Club Card. safeway.com.

» FOR 8 MORE THINGS TO DO DEALS, SEE PAGE 5

INSIDE SUNDAY LIVING

- 3 TV listings
- 4 Puzzles
- 7 Pets

ARIZONA LIVING
SUNDAY

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2010

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC LIVING.AZCENTRAL.COM

SECTION E



HOPE ONE PERSON AT A TIME

NON-PROFIT COALITION HELPS MOST-VULNERABLE HOMELESS GET INTO A HOME

By Karina Bland
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Donna Saylor lay partly under the bushes on the grounds of St. Mary's Basilica in downtown Phoenix, her wheelchair beside her, her hand laced through the spokes so no one could steal it. She watched the stars and prayed.

"Jesus, please just let me die with some dignity. Please don't let me die on the sidewalk."

A sidewalk is no place for anyone to live, let alone a 53-year-old woman in a wheelchair.

Just before the sun came up, someone shook Saylor awake. She grumbled at them to go away, even when they offered her a coupon for free food from McDonald's.

"I don't eat McDonald's," she said, propping herself up on her elbows. "It's bad for you."

The people prodding Saylor from sleep were from Project H3: Home, Health, Hope, a collaborative effort of more than 30 non-profit, faith-based and governmental agencies and busi-

nesses headed by the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness. The goal is to get the most medically vulnerable homeless people into housing.

For three nights in April, 163 volunteers crept around buildings and parks, tiptoed down alleys and prowled dry riverbeds to find homeless people and talk to them about how they were faring. Their sleepy answers to a 32-question survey allowed the volunteers to rank the ones they needed to get off the streets first.

For Saylor, it was the answer to her prayer. Four months later, she was in the middle of her very own studio apartment near Grand Avenue and McDowell Road in Phoenix, her arms thrown wide.

"I love it!" she says. "This is like a mansion to me."



PROJECT H3

Top: Donna Saylor is "so overwhelmed" with her new apartment, giving a hug to Mattie Lord, who is part of the coalition that helped get Saylor off the streets.

Above: Saylor, Myron Marquardt and Troy Therikildsen have been helped by the coalition.

ABOVE PHOTO BY DAVID WALLACE/
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Saylor had been homeless for about a year. She was a housewife before, living in Salt Lake City, taking care of her husband and making hats and blankets for drug-addicted babies at nearby hospitals. Her husband killed himself two years ago. An aunt brought her to the Valley, but then passed away.

"I'm so happy for you," says Maurice Cunningham, her best friend. Cunningham still lives at the homeless shelter where they met.

The apartment is more than Saylor prayed for. She surveys the little kitchen, announcing what she finds there: microwave, coffeemaker, boxes of green tea — "I like that" — and sea salt — "That's healthy."

"Oh, wow! Look at all this food," she says, opening and closing the cabinets and refrigerator.

Saylor hasn't cooked in some time. She used to make liver and onions, meat-loaf and vegetable soup from scratch.

Maybe she could have a dinner party, she says.

"I'd have to call everyone first to find out what kind of frozen dinner they like," she says, covering her mouth with one hand and laughing.

A door opens to the bathroom, where pale peach and lavender towels hang from a rack. Saylor rups her hands over them: "Maurice, look at my towels." On the street, she never knew when she'd get to shower. Now she can shower every day, twice if she wants to.

"I'm just so overwhelmed," Saylor says. "I'll probably just break down tonight and cry and cry and cry."

She hugs Mattie Lord, chief program officer at UMOM New Day Centers, a non-profit group that helps homeless families and is part of the coalition.

"Thank you for letting us help you," Lord says.

The Arizona project is part of the nationwide 100,000 Homes Campaign started in June by Common Ground, a New York foundation that is raising awareness of homelessness by finding housing for 100,000 people. In Arizona, the coordinated effort has agencies and businesses pooling resources to get people into housing quickly.

Of the 262 homeless people surveyed, 106 needed to get off the streets quickly or else they would die. They were old and sick, mentally ill or alcoholic. The project's goal is to get the first 50 into housing by April 2011. As of late September, 13 people had been relocated, eight to permanent housing and five to temporary housing or rehab. The process has started with the next group.

"These guys are used to being invisible on the streets. We ignore them. We step over them," says Steve Meissner, a spokesman for the state Department of Economic Security, also part of the coalition. He volunteered to help with the survey and was on hand in July when Myron Marquardt, a 61-year-old veteran who had been homeless for 27 years, moved into a one-bedroom apartment near Seventh Avenue and Osborn Road.

The place was packed with people bringing in furniture and hanging a "Welcome home, Myron" banner across the doorway.

"He's got an army of people behind him now," Meissner says.

One by one, the homeless identified as the most vulnerable are being moved into apartments, where volunteers arrive with balloons, bedsheets and Crock-Pots of spaghetti. With an estimated 15,000 homeless in Arizona in 2009, getting one person into an apartment may not seem to be the solution to a large problem. But Mike Shore, CEO of HOM Inc., a private company that operates subsidized-housing programs and a coalition member, says, "This is the solution. One person at a time."

There are so many homeless people who need the coalition's help that looking at them as a group can be overwhelming, Lord says. There's some satisfaction in moving methodically through the list, checking off No. 1, Troy Therikidsen, who's 48, is dealing with serious health issues and has been homeless for almost two years.

On the streets, he was robbed repeatedly. Once, he got beat up three times in a single week. They took what little he had — a bedroll, his wallet and his medicine. He feels safe in his new one-bedroom apartment, which even has a view of the swimming pool.

"I still can't believe my luck," Therikidsen says. "I had really started to lose

"I love it! This is like a mansion to me," Donna Saylor says of the studio apartment she has thanks to the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness.



How to help

The goal of the project is to get the 50 most medically vulnerable people off the streets by April 2011. You can volunteer to help stock a kitchen, make meals, move furniture or donate money, household items, gift cards or tickets to social events like ballgames and art exhibits.

Details:

azceh.org/PH3.html.



Above: As Myron Marquardt moved into his own apartment after decades of homelessness, he said, "This is the first time in 20 years that it feels like people care about me."

Right: Troy Therikidsen says he "still can't believe my luck," moving into his new apartment. After being homeless for nearly two years, "I had really started to lose hope."

hope."

No. 2 on the list was Marquardt and then Saylor.

All the furniture is donated, though the people get to pick out what they want. In addition, each person is assigned two "navigators," who help them after they've moved in with transportation, food boxes, employment and even just company.

It's like checking up on an aunt or uncle, Lord says, just to make sure everything is fine. A navigator will come by at least every other day. Each person also has a sponsor, a business or organization that helps pay their expenses. The apartments are existing government-subsidized housing.

"This is the first time in 20 years that it feels like people care about me," Marquardt says.

Someone has framed photographs of Marquardt and his younger brother, Howard, who was also homeless and who died a year ago at age 59, his body found on a sidewalk in downtown Phoenix.

"It's your first picture in your new house," says Robin Bernier, a social worker with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"That's really awesome," Marquardt says. He leans on the counter, his back to everyone else, and dips his head to hide his tears. He wipes his face on the sleeve of his crisp burgundy button-down shirt with an American flag pin on the collar.

"It's a little overwhelming, isn't it?" Bernier says. She pats his back.

Esther Trevino and Carl Kirkendoll, who work at Southwest Behavioral Health Services, a non-profit agency in Phoenix, show Marquardt around the rest of the apartment.

Who are the homeless?

"Project H3: Home, Health, Hope," a collaborative effort of more than 50 non-profit, faith-based and governmental agencies and businesses headed by the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness, is working to get the most medically vulnerable homeless people into housing. In April, volunteers crisscrossed the Valley to talk with 262 homeless people about how they were faring. Their answers to a 32-question survey allowed the volunteers to rank the ones they needed to get off the streets first. The findings include:

89 percent of the Valley's homeless are coping with behavioral health issues.

On average, they have been living on the streets for 7.8 years.

40 percent have health conditions associated with a high risk of dying.

9 percent were 60 or older. The oldest was 77.

36 percent had been victims of violent attacks on the street.

11 percent had been in foster care as children.

21 percent are veterans.

Source: Project H3



PHOTOS BY DAVID WALLACE/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

"This is nice, real nice," Marquardt says.

From here, he'll be able to take the bus to his doctor's appointments at the VA Medical Center. Trevino and Kirkendoll will teach him to grocery shop and cook again. They'll take him to ballgames and to the movies in the hopes that he doesn't get restless and decide to wander. Life on the street is busy, and homeless people get used to moving about a lot.

Marquardt used to use a walker, but now that he's sober, getting regular meals and has some shoes that fit, he doesn't need it.

"He's come a long way," Trevino says. "It was hard for him to trust us. It was hard for him to believe this was for real."

A few miles away, Saylor's navigators helped her get a new Social Security card, sign up for services and get to a doctor. She has a new wheelchair. Saylor has lung disease, and although she can walk a bit, she needs the wheelchair to go any real distance.

"I didn't know how to do all that," Saylor says. "I needed to be taken by the hand."

She points out a painting of a butterfly on the wall to her friend Cunningham and says proudly, "That's my picture."

"I've seen her turn from a caterpillar

into a butterfly," Cunningham says, nodding at Saylor.

She's dressed in a yellow floral dress, her hair is pulled back in a tidy ponytail. She's sober now, and she's going to church. Skeins of yarn — blue, yellow and red — are in a bag on the bed. She had started a blanket while she was on the streets, but it was stolen. She can't wait to get started on another one.

"I was a housewife all my life, so I can't wait to mop my floors and take care of that plant. That will be my high from now on," she says.

Cunningham reminds her, "Now you can't lie out on the sidewalk and look at the stars."

"It will be good for my body to be in a bed," Saylor says, looking at the pretty floral comforter piled with pillows. Like a kid, she throws herself onto the bed, laughing.

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