

Volunteers take on night to help homeless

BY DAVID POLLARD
DPOLLARD@PIONEERLOCAL.COM

Volunteers late Wednesday and early Thursday searched abandoned buildings, woods and parking lots in Sanford and Lee County in order to get an accurate count of the homeless population in the area.

Their efforts were part of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's nationwide Point in Time Count.

HUD uses the data in the congressionally-mandated Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. The report informs Congress of the number of homeless people in the U.S. and gauges the effectiveness of HUD's programs and policies in decreasing those numbers.

SEE HOMELESS/PAGE A8



David Pollard | The Sanford Herald

Volunteer John Paschal, with the Point in Time Count, steps inside an abandoned warehouse on Goldsboro Avenue, as volunteers Katie Lemke and Shadonna Headen prepare to follow Wednesday night. Paschal, Lemke and Headen were among and some 50 volunteers who fanned out across Sanford and Lee County in an attempt to count the area's homeless population.

HOMELESS

FROM PAGE A1

On the local level, the counts help communities plan services and programs to address local needs, measure progress in decreasing homelessness, and identify strengths and gaps in their current homelessness assistance system, according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

Some 50 people volunteered locally to take part in one of two shifts: 10 p.m. Wednesday night and 4: a.m. Thursday morning. In all, at least 67 locations in the area frequented by homeless people were checked.

Cindy Hall, minister of outreach at First Baptist Church, served as the Point in Time Count leader for Lee County. S3 Housing Connect, the city and county's joint homelessness initiative, organized the effort. Hall said, in total, 100 people were counted, matching exactly the number counted last year.

Along with checking local homeless shelters, volunteers made contact with people living in wooded areas, abandoned buildings,

cars and parking lots.

Volunteers, wearing glow sticks and some carrying flashlights, also carried yellow bags filled with gloves, socks, blankets and pop-top non-perishable canned goods to give to the people they encountered.

John Paschal, in his third year volunteering, was among a group of five during the Wednesday night shift that visited a dozen locations known to be frequented by the homeless. Though not a single soul was located in two hours, it wasn't for a lack of trying. Paschal and the others, working in temperatures below 40 degrees and with little more than the beam of a flashlight to guide them, made their way through high brush, darkened buildings and along soggy dirt paths to ensure every person was counted.

Paschal said volunteering was his way of exercising his faith.

"I'm a dedicated member of the Lord's army and I do what he asks me to do," he said.

Reach Reporter David Pollard at 919-718-1229.

