

St. Petersburg Times

Carolers to support homeless

[EAST, SOUTH, BEACH, SEMINOLE Edition]

St. Petersburg Times - St. Petersburg, Fla.
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Date: Dec 3, 2006
Start Page: 11
Section: NEIGHBORHOOD TIMES
Text Word Count: 459

Document Text

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More than 100 people are expected to join in a 20-year tradition Friday as they sing Christmas carols to honor St. Petersburg's homeless.

The "Still No Room at the Inn" carolers, sponsored by ASAP Homeless Services, will visit various homeless shelters and nursing homes in downtown St. Petersburg.

"This is a real community effort," said John Stewart, a teacher at Osceola High School who is helping to organize the caroling event.

"When we started the caroling 20 years ago, there were only a few of us and we drew little attention," he said. "Last year we had over 140 carolers."

This year, Stewart recruited the school's choral director, as well as many of the school's cheerleaders and chorus members, to join.

TASCO, a teen development program operated by the St. Petersburg Recreation Department, has recruited Group X, a local rap group, to participate.

The annual caroling event draws parallels between the homeless and the Nativity story and supports ASAP's efforts to help the homeless.

"We are caroling to remind St. Petersburg residents and themselves that 2,000 years after the first Christmas there is 'still no room at the inn' for homeless people in St. Petersburg," Stewart said.

As many as 1,600 people seek shelter every night, according to ASAP director Karen Butler. Of those, 44 percent are adults with jobs and 24 percent are children under the age of 18, many of whom are on their own.

Fast facts

Friday events to keep a cause alive

Kickoff cookout: Friday's caroling event starts at 5 p.m. behind the ASAP Drop-In Center, 423 11th Ave. S, where participants will join with ASAP shelter residents for a cookout, accompanied by Group X's rap music.

Caroling: From 7 to 9 p.m., the carolers will sing their way through downtown St. Petersburg, ending at the manger scene in Straub Park, where the Renaissance Vinoy Resort and Golf Club will provide refreshments.

Parking: Available at the Salvador Dali Museum, at 11th Avenue S and Third Street S, a short walk to the ASAP center. ASAP will provide transportation back to the parking lot after the event.

Information: To participate in the caroling or find out more about ASAP's services, call 823-5665.

About ASAP

ASAP was started in 1986 and provides a variety of services for homeless people:

- Emergency apartments for women and children with clothing, personal hygiene items, telephone service, counseling and referrals to other agencies.
- Drop-in-center serving nearly 7,000 clients. Services include showers, clothing, food, bus tokens and referrals to other agencies. The center also provides a phone number and mailing address for employment and benefit purposes.
- Transitional housing at two apartments, where families can live for up to one year while they work toward self-sufficiency and independent living.

Source: ASAP

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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