

THINGS TO DO

Dignity Day offers 'love and support' to homeless community

Spirits high at Saturday event despite rain



Juan Carlos Hernandez gets his haircut by Clarita Barlow from MGM Salon in Fairfield during Dignity Day at the Solano Dream Center in Vallejo on Saturday. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)



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Juan Campos smiled and chatted with a friend, clearly enjoying the attention as a hairdresser trimmed his hair during Dignity Day at the Solano Dream Center on Saturday.

Along with haircuts, there were showers, clothes, shoes, backpacks, hot lunches, mental health, and housing help for members of the homeless community. Despite a light drizzle, spirits were high, and 85 people received assistance, Volunteer Coordinator Rochelle Ford said.

Ali Ashraf was one of the first people to arrive. "I've been coming every six months for years," he said. Dignity Day is held twice a year in Vallejo, in April and September. Ashraf said he was there for resources, including a tent, shoes, and socks.

"My favorite part is seeing the people and the love and support I receive," he said.

That love and support come from volunteers, who gathered at 9:30 a.m., a half-hour before the event began, for a briefing by Michael Hester, the retired pharmacist who created Dignity Day in 2021. His organization is the Solano Dignity and Care Foundation.

Referring to the rain forecast, Hester told the volunteers, "God is going to take care of us," adding, "Once we pack up and leave, that's another thing," to chuckles from the crowd.

As people arrived, each one was paired up with a volunteer from a local church who escorted them from station to station.

Most of the tables, including Lighthouse Covenant Fellowship, Fighting Back Partnership, Vallejo Mobile Health, Solano County, and Housing First Solano, were under canopies, shielding them from the rain.



Linda Maldonado with Liberty Dignity Church of Fairfield helps a person in need with clothes during Dignity Day at the Solano Dream Center in Vallejo on Saturday. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

At the Solano Public Health table, health educator Kelly Hinkle loaded a hygiene kit, food, and Narcan into a black drawstring bag and handed it to one of the attendees.

“Hinkle is part of the SCOUT team for the unhoused,” said her teammate Sheri Buckley, a public health nurse who helps people in the field. The acronym stands for Solano County Outreach Team, she said.

In an interview, “Most of us don’t think about being dignified. It’s something we’re honored with, but for the unhoused, it’s a rarity. We love that we are able to honor them, and we invite one and all to come,” Hester said.

“The very first one we had was March 2021,” Hester continued. “We were still in the height of the pandemic. It literally was dropped into my spirit by God. He told me what to do and how to do it, and even gave me the name: Dignity Day.”

It’s definitely needed. Homelessness increased 50 percent in Vallejo between 2022 and 2024, according to Solano County’s 2024 Point in Time homeless count, with 682 people homeless at some point in Vallejo in 2024.

Two hundred and thirty-three people experiencing homelessness were counted in Vacaville. Homelessness grew 6 percent in the Bay Area in 2024.

In 2025, for the first time in a long time, there were positive developments regarding homelessness in Vallejo.

In June, the Navigation Center, a homeless shelter, opened. The opening represented 10 years of effort by three mayors, six City Councils, and a plethora of partners, including CAP Solano JPA, HUD, Kaiser Permanente, Sutter Health, and NorthBay Health.

The Navigation Center at 1937 Broadway has 125 beds for people experiencing homelessness, plus wraparound services including case management, employment assistance, and health care. It will serve up to 200 individuals.

Broadway Village — a 47-unit permanent supportive housing facility for people experiencing homelessness — finally opened to residents in December. The permanent supportive housing facility includes an on-site property manager, a community room, and a courtyard.

The city’s Blue Oak Landing Project, a 74-unit permanent supportive housing

At Saturday's event, "It's such a blessing getting a chance to know people and their stories and help provide them with resources," said Katie Hansen, a volunteer, of the event.

Her husband Josh added, "Every one of them is a person – not a statistic."

2026 > April > 11