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HOMELESS MEMORIAL DAY SET FOR DEC. 21
Candlelight vigil, performances, call to action
to honor people who have died

Missoula residents will gather on the first day of winter and longest night of the year on Thursday at 5:30 p.m. in Caras Park to remember homeless and formerly homeless Missoulians who died in the past year. Inspired by the efforts of the National Coalition for the Homeless, which has sponsored National Homeless Persons' Memorials every year since 1990, Missoula will join more than 150 cities and counties across the United States to bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness and to remember those who have died while living without permanent homes.

People in attendance at this event will include Mayor John Engen; County Commissioner Dave Strohmaier; Theresa Williams, Coordinator of Reaching Home: Missoula's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness and of Missoula's At-Risk Housing Coalition; homeless advocates; service providers; homeless and formerly homeless people; religious and spiritual leaders; and concerned citizens. Building on the National Coalition's theme of "remember, hope, and heal," the event will feature a ceremonial reading of the names of more than 10 people, homeless and formerly homeless, who died in the past year in Missoula.

The memorial is also a call to end chronic homelessness – homelessness experienced by those diagnosed with a disabling condition who have been living on our streets and in our shelters the longest. Under the umbrella of Missoula's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness and the Coordinator of the At-Risk Housing Coalition, Missoula recently implemented new strategies in the Coordinated Entry System in hopes of providing this vulnerable population with quick pathways out of homelessness.

Both the City of Missoula and Missoula County have proclaimed Dec. 21 as Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. The event is open to the public, and news coverage is welcome. Hot beverages will be provided. People are encouraged to bring toiletries, dental care items and canned food to support Project Community Connect, which will take place on Friday, Jan. 26.

More information and background information on National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day is available at <http://nationalhomeless.org/about-us/projects/memorial-day/>, <http://www.nhchc.org/memorialday.html> and Missoula's event has a Facebook page found at <https://www.facebook.com/events/1796673647242351/>.

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