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TOP STORY

## Knights "Go Homeless" for Warming Place

By Dean Geddes [dgeddes@inkym.com](mailto:dgeddes@inkym.com)

Mar 10, 2025

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Mike Gillies tries to stay warm on a bench on Main Street.



*(March 10, 2025)* What started as an unseasonably warm winter evening quickly turned into a windswept and rain-soaked night on the streets of Nantucket for the Knights of Columbus.

On Wednesday night, Ash Wednesday, a group of the St. Mary's Catholic Church Parish of the Knights set out to "Go Homeless" for a night, raising money for The Warming Place, Nantucket's homeless shelter.

"It was a fierce but also beautiful night, with many strolls around sleepy downtown at 3, 4 and 5 a.m. to keep the blood moving, stay warm and pass the time," Knight Luke Thornewill said.

"We knew our night would come to an end, showers were waiting and everything we had could go in the dryer. That's not an option for the real deal. Their situation just goes on and on. For me this night underlined the harshness of life for many."

For Mike Gillies, head Knight, this was about not just homelessness on Nantucket, but also housing insecurity and the people who have to work two or more jobs just to cover the high cost of rent on the island.

"People who stay in a job because their boss has their housing and holds it over their head, or people who stay in bad relationships because they don't have a housing choice, or living multiple people in a small house because that's all they can do, it's all happening here," he said.

Beau Almodobar and Mark Gonnella, both school teachers and Knights, said they have known fellow teachers who have had to spend nights in their cars because of the "Nantucket Shuffle," having a place to live in the off-season but being forced out by higher rents paid by vacationers during the summer months.

"It hits everybody across the board, and it's a big impactful thing," Gonnella said.

The Warming Place is what this fundraiser is all about. Nantucket's homeless shelter provides overnight services seven days a week, four nights at the Summer Street Church and three nights at the First Congregational Church. It also operates a daytime shelter Mondays and Thursdays at the Summer Street Church.



Mark Lopes at the start of the night, before the wind and rain set in.

Courtesy of Luke Thornewill

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So far, the first Nantucket "Knights Go Homeless" has raised more than \$6,000 and counting, Gillies said.

Each Knight raised their own amount, asking friends, neighbors and co-workers to either donate once or an amount per hour, and they had donations from as far away as the Knights of Columbus council in Cincinnati.

Some island businesses, like Stubby's, chipped in, and one parishioner from St. Mary's donated \$100 an hour for a total of \$1,200.

While some Knights stayed out until late in the night, eventually going home because of work obligations, six braved the entire overnight and into the morning: Jimmy Durette, Brannigan, Thornewill, Gillies, Gonnella and Mark Lopes.

There is a connection between some of the Knights and the Warming Place. Vin Debaggis is on the board of the nonprofit and Rich Brannigan Sr. volunteers at The Warming Place.

He said people would be surprised at the homelessness problem on Nantucket, which belies its reputation as a posh and affluent vacation destination.

At the same time, it's still winter, and The Warming Place has seen more than 50 different people escape the freezing cold for an afternoon or bunk down on one of its cots for the night at its shelters since it opened for the season, more than double the number it annually served in its first three years of existence.

“We average between eight to 10 people a night in the winter,” Brannigan said. “Everybody has their own cot and a bin to store their possessions. A couple of restaurants provide

food, like B-ACK Yard BBQ, Sophie T's, I think the Brotherhood, and the Knights of Columbus do a home-cooked meal on Sundays (for The Warming Place).”

“We had two Knights stay three hours, two knights stay until midnight, one stayed until 2 a.m. and six knights did 12 hours, from 6:30 p.m. to 6:30 the next morning,” Gillies said. “It ended up being a very prayerful, very wet and uncomfortable night.”

Those interested in learning more about the Knights of Columbus or to donate to the fundraiser, e-mail [KofC2612@gmail.com](mailto:KofC2612@gmail.com)

The Knights of Columbus are a global service order of Catholic men focused on charitable work. Nantucket’s local Council #2612 was founded in 1926 by Father T.J McGee.

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