

Pillars is born: Three organizations merge in effort to help homeless in the Fox Cities

Chris Mueller, Appleton Post-Crescent

Published 5:50 p.m. CT Oct. 1, 2018



(Photo: Dan Powers/USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)
CONNECTTWEETLINKEDINCOMMENTEMAILMORE

APPLETON - A new organization, known as Pillars, became a reality Monday as three organizations that help those experiencing homelessness in the Fox Cities officially merged.

The organizations formerly known as Homeless Connections, the Fox Valley Warming Shelter and the Housing Partnership of the Fox Cities now exist as a single entity, employing about 50 people and providing a total of about 48,000 nights of shelter to people experiencing homelessness in the Fox Cities.

The merger has been years in the making, Joe Mauthe, the new executive director of Pillars, said Monday during the merger announcement, which took place at U.S. Venture in Appleton.

"We knew that if we were going to do this, we needed to do it right," said Mauthe, who had been executive director at Housing Partnership of the Fox Cities.

RELATED: [Charitable organizations plan merger to help Fox Cities homeless](#)

RELATED: [Despite low poverty rates, food insecurity still exists in Fox Cities](#)

The merger was a lot of work, Mauthe said, but everyone involved made it happen as smoothly as possible.

"I never saw a bit of ego or selfishness in this process," he said. "The focus was always pure. It was always about how can we do more and how can we do better for our clients."

Appleton Mayor Tim Hanna attended the announcement and praised the contributions the three organizations have made to the community.

"There is a deep, deep ethic of compassion in the Fox Cities," he said. "You can see it in this room."

Hanna also spoke about his involvement in the homeless counts that happen twice a year across the Fox Cities.

The merger doesn't mean the end of any of the services provided by the three organizations. All of the current services and programs will continue, Mauthe said.



A crowd listens Monday during the announcement of the merger of three nonprofit organizations that serve the homeless in the Fox Cities. (Photo: Dan Powers/USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

The new organization will have several locations in the Fox Cities:

- Pillars Adult Shelter, formerly known as the Fox Valley Warming Shelter, at 1928 W. College Ave. in Appleton.
- Pillars Adult & Family Shelter, formerly known as Homeless Connections, at 400 N. Division St. in Appleton.

- Pillars, formerly known as Housing Partnership of the Fox Cities, at 605 E. Hancock St. in Appleton. This will be the organization's primary mailing address.
- Ascend, at 990 Apple Blossom Drive in Neenah.

The shelters in the Fox Cities now under the operation of Pillars are full almost every night, Mauthe said.

Poverty rates in Wisconsin are slightly lower than the U.S. average, and rates in the Fox Cities are even lower, according to the United Way Fox Cities LIFE Study, which measures demographic, economic, social and health issues in the Fox Cities.

Winnebago County was at a 12.1 percent poverty rate in 2014, while Outagamie County was at 10 percent and Calumet County was at 5.9 percent. The federal poverty threshold that year was an annual income of \$24,008 or lower for a family of four.

But the study, typically updated every five years, also found household income has grown slowly while rent has generally gone up in the region.