

Catholic woman spearheads campaign to help homeless during Olympics

VANCOUVER, British Columbia - When most people think of the Olympic visitors flocking to this city, they imagine athletes and spectators from around the world. But that's not what sprang to mind for Carolyn Wharton of Star of the Sea Parish in White Rock, nearly 30 miles outside Vancouver.

Instead, Wharton immediately thought of all the homeless people making their way to Vancouver for what they see as an opportunity to roam a greener pasture. Wharton noted that the homeless population of every Olympic Games host city increases by 300-400 during the games.

Wharton is the coordinator of her parish's volunteer group, the Helpers of St. Anne. Every year they hand-make 25-30 convertible coats for homeless men and women - the thick and heavy garments convert to sleeping bags.

Wharton decided to increase this year's quota. She had to get the coats commercially made because the workload was too high for Star of the Sea's volunteers. With that came great cost.

"We raised over \$20,000 for the project" to have 144 multipurpose coats made, Wharton said. "We used 100 percent Canadian fabrics only."

The knee-length coat comes in a shoulder bag, made from the same durable material as the coat, that doubles as the bottom of the sleeping bag. There are also many pockets in the jackets, inside and out. Instructions for using the coat are sewn into an inside seam.

"Our volunteers pray all year long for the people who receive these coats," noted Wharton. "We hope they understand that Our Lord has not forgotten them."

When the Helpers of St. Anne hand out the coats, they usually stuff the pockets with

toiletries, gloves, scarves and small food items.

“She’s the spark plug,” Allan Whyte, past grand knight of the Knights of Columbus Council 7015, said of Wharton. The council donated \$2,600 to the effort.