Getting homeless off streets — and out of jail

Agencies work together for shelter

BY LANIE LEE COOK
lcook@theadvocate.com

It's not news that jails are crowded, the state's criminal justice system is clogged with inefficiency and that a lot of people sleep outdoors in downtown Lafayette.

But public agencies and private businesses have banded together to try to address those ills by funding a new and in-the-works shelter. They intend for it to serve the dual purpose of getting people off of Lafayette's streets at night while diverting some petty offenders from spending a night in jail.

"It's a point-of-contact option for a police officer to divert an individual from jail and into a location where they'll get better treatment and, potentially, they won't become entangled with the criminal justice system," Corrections Director Rob Reardon, of the Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office, said of the shelter plans.

While traditional shelters tend to have stringent admission policies when it comes to intoxication, people will be allowed into the "low-barrier" shelter, as it's called, whether they're under the influence or suffering from mental illness — so long as they don't need medical attention.

Two existing shelters serve men in Lafayette, but one of them is always at capacity, while the other has strict rules that deter some from seeking its services.

Catholic Services of Acadiana's St. Joseph men's shelter, on St. John Street, has capacity for 38 people plus 20 disabled veterans, and the shelter...