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Mission's menu is hope, dignity

Minister and volunteers rescue needy with food and comfort

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BRIDGEPORT — The needy and downtrodden lined up at Washington Park on Thanksgiving Day because they knew a hot meal and a warm friend would be there.

The Rev. Jim Watson, 41, founder of the Bridgeport Rescue Mission, along with several volunteers, fed a traditional dinner from their van to well over 100 people ranging in age from toddlers to senior citizens.

What's different about Watson's interdenominational food program is that it brings meals and blankets to places where it is easy for the needy to get them.

"If it weren't for people like this coming out to help us, I don't know what we'd do," said Linda Moore, who picked up a turkey dinner and blanket. "Thank them and thank God."

"These missions are doing a lot more for people than all of the government agen-

tribution of meals and blankets on city streets: at 6 p.m. Mondays at McLevy Park downtown; at 6 p.m. Thursdays at Washington Park; and again at Washington Park at noon Saturdays. Since initiating the program, an average of between 150 to 200 people are served simple but nutritious meals each week.

Many who come for food also ask for other types of help. Watson says he has gotten some people into drug treatment programs.

Still others are helped by the mission's own Christian-based shelter on Harriet Street, which was opened by Watson in May.

Watson and his wife, Tammy, and three children came to Bridgeport in 1993 after he spent several years as the executive director of a rescue mission in West Virginia. Down South, he had a full-time staff of 29 people, a 100-bed shelter and a soup kitchen that served 300 meals each day.

He wanted to come to a city and start a mission from scratch. He chose Bridgeport



The Rev. Jim Watson, meeting with visitors to his mission, came to Bridgeport from West Virginia with his wife and three

children because he saw the tremendous needs in the city. The mission serves between 150 and 200 meals a week.

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