February 2026

DONOR Connection

PITTSBURGH MERCY
A HERITAGE OF HOPE

Join Us Saturday Evening for CNOY!

It's almost here: the 2026 Pittsburgh Mercy Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) walk!

We invite you to join the **100+ Pittsburgh walkers** ready to walk for a cause, joined by special guests AMO, the Pittsburgh Riverhounds SC mascot, and Steely McBeam, the Pittsburgh Steelers mascot. You'll enjoy beautiful views of the city skyline, get in some healthy steps, and most of all, raise money for a worthy cause alongside fellow Pittsburgh Mercy supporters. Together, we can help ensure that everyone has access to the support they need—for body, mind, and spirit.

AMO from the Pittsburgh Riverhounds SC is ready to meet you at the starting line of the 2026 Coldest Night of the Year walk!

✨ Be part of the fun.
✨ Support your neighbors.
✨ Make an impact.

Event Details

Date: Saturday, February 28, 2026
Time: 4 – 7 p.m. *(Pittsburgh Mercy and Bethlehem Haven President & CEO Jaime Dircksen and WTAE reporter Carlos Flores will welcome walkers and kickoff the walk at 5 p.m.)*
Walk Route: 1 or 3 miles along the North Shore
Start/End Location: Pittsburgh Mercy Administrative Offices
Address: 1200 Reedsdale Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15233
Parking: Free parking onsite

Register at Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh Mercy) - Coldest Night of the Year 2026. We hope to see you there! If you can't join the walk, you can donate to any of the registered teams.

Pittsburgh Mercy Staff Go Above and Beyond During Winter Storm

Record-setting low temperatures and heavy snow in January 2026 created dangerous conditions throughout Pittsburgh, making it more critical than ever for individuals experiencing homelessness to find safe shelter from the cold. As the city activated Code Blue emergency protocols, Pittsburgh Mercy's Winter Overflow Shelter at Second Avenue Commons became an essential lifeline.

The Overflow Shelter typically accommodates about 40 people, but that number often fluctuates—and rapidly increases—during Code Blue declarations. When the National Weather Service forecasts temperatures below 26°F, or when the City of Pittsburgh's Office of Emergency Management activates its Emergency Operations Center, the shelter expands capacity to ensure no one is left outside in life-threatening weather.

As temperatures plunged and snow loomed at the end of January, shelter staff acted quickly, preparing mats and cots for guests. Priority was given to individuals with ADA or ambulatory concerns—those guests are deliberately placed at Second Avenue Commons so they do not have to endure the physical stress of traveling by shuttle to the North Side overflow shelter. Staff also transformed the building's engagement center—typically used only during daytime hours—into an overnight space so more people could be safely sheltered. At the storm's height, the overflow shelter housed upwards of 65 guests.

"Our biggest focus was making sure people had a place to be sheltered during the extreme temperatures," said Program Manager **Jerrod Foster**, one of several Pittsburgh Mercy team members who stayed onsite for more than 24 hours to ensure uninterrupted care when travel became hazardous.

"I would like to recognize my Pittsburgh Mercy colleague Laurie Polens, who worked the 24-hour shift alongside me, as well as Jonathan Rainey from Allegheny County Department of Human Services, who provided additional support throughout the night and into the following day," said Foster. "Their support was critical for helping shelter guests and staff weather the storm."

Their dedication was backed by established partnerships and preparation: staff had coordinated with Allegheny County and AdHawk to secure bedding, toiletries, towels, food, and other essentials in the event that supply chains were disrupted by the inclement weather. Winter preparation also includes gathering critical in-kind donations such as hats, gloves, blankets, socks, and handwarmers—items that can make the difference between warmth and frostbite for someone arriving from the cold.

Inside the shelter, every guest receives a warm meal upon entering and breakfast before leaving in the morning. The population served during the current (2025-2026) overflow season includes many older adults, with a large portion between ages 50 and 69—those for whom exposure to extreme temperatures poses even greater health risks.

Far more than a place to sleep, Pittsburgh Mercy's Winter Overflow Shelter is a cornerstone of the city and county's Code Blue emergency response plan and a critical resource when Pittsburgh faces its harshest weather. Even with the tireless work of staff, the need is profound. "I wish we could do more," said Supervisor **Lauren Bivins**, voicing a sentiment shared by many shelter staff who see the growing demand firsthand.

During January's historic freeze, the compassion, readiness, and resilience of the Pittsburgh Mercy team ensured that dozens of neighbors had a safe, warm place to go. Their efforts helped the community weather one of the coldest weeks on record—and reminded us all what care looks like when it matters most.

To learn more about Pittsburgh Mercy's homeless services, visit our website.

Future healthcare leaders visit emergency shelter

Pittsburgh Mercy would like to send a special thank-you to recent undergraduate student volunteers from the University of Pittsburgh! As part of a national student-led movement called **Voices of Equity**, their mission is to reduce health disparities and advance health equity with a specific focus on improving and advocating for the health of people experiencing homelessness in Allegheny County.

Members of Pitt's Voices of Equity student group pose for a photo after organizing clothing donations at Pittsburgh Mercy's emergency shelter at Second Avenue Commons.

"We started looking for local organizations doing direct, on-the-ground work" with whom to partner, said club member **Izzy Bowser**, a senior at Pitt. "Pittsburgh Mercy stood out because of its comprehensive services and its commitment to serving people with dignity. After meeting with Brendan [Copp, the volunteer and engagement coordinator] and learning more about the emergency shelter at Second Avenue Commons, we saw an opportunity to meaningfully engage" in the community, said Bowser. "Volunteering there was a great first step that aligned directly with our mission, supporting vulnerable communities while learning from and working alongside local partners."

Pittsburgh Mercy staff appreciated the volunteers' efforts, noting that it will save them time that can be re-directed to serving shelter guests. "With Voices of Equity's help, we were able to take a much needed inventory of our clothing donations and organize them in a way that makes them more accessible to staff working with shelter guests who are in need of things like shoes, a jacket, a sweater," said Copp. "Now it will be so much easier to help meet these basic needs."

Thank you, Voices of Equity, for your time and care!

Volunteer with Pittsburgh Mercy

At Pittsburgh Mercy, our volunteers provide a truly meaningful and enriching experience for community members in need. ***Thank you to our compassionate and inspiring volunteers!***

Would ***you*** like to make a difference in the lives of the thousands of people served by our programs? Pittsburgh Mercy offers numerous ways to get involved.

Consider these volunteer opportunities:

- Serving food at Second Avenue Commons.
- Hosting a sports event watch party at a behavioral health residential program.
- Creating fun arts and crafts at our adult day programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Making PB&J sandwiches for persons served at Pittsburgh Mercy's Engagement Center at Second Avenue Commons.
- Sorting donated clothing and basic hygiene supplies for people experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, or other crises.

For more details or to sign up, contact Pittsburgh Mercy's Volunteer and Engagement Coordinator Brendan Copp at Brendan.Copp@pittsburghmercy.org or 412-897-8822.

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