

# As need ebbs, migrant aid site closes

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STAFF WRITER

The city's Migrant Resource Center, which opened seven months ago and provided aid to more than 32,000 asylum-seekers, is closing its doors Friday.

The center opened amid an overwhelming flow of migrants who were released at the border with dates to appear before immigration officials.

"We were responding for something we were not funded for or prepared for," said Colleen Bridger, assistant city manager. "So in San Antonio's typical fashion, we all rolled up our shirt sleeves and said 'All right, here's a problem, let's deal with it.' "

In recent months, the number

of migrants approaching the border has plummeted and many of those who do make it there are subject to the Trump administration's "Remain in Mexico" policy, which forces asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico for their U.S. court proceedings.

Bridger said the city could respond again if a large influx of migrants comes through San Antonio.

In June, the center reached its peak weekly total, with 2,192 migrants spending the night at Travis Park Church in one week. But by late September, that number had dwindled to 175.

Lately, Bridger said only five or fewer migrants arrive each day.

The city's center was a brief

way station for migrants attempting to reach relatives in the U.S. Border Patrol facilities became so full earlier this year that officials began releasing migrants instead of detaining them.

Thousands of them were dumped in Laredo and Eagle Pass and put on buses to San Antonio.

The migrants – mainly Central American families with small children – arrived at the San Antonio bus station penniless, hungry and with little to no English skills.

Local nonprofits were overwhelmed by the numbers so the city stepped in, making use of a vacant storefront it owned – a former Quizno's.

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# MIGRANT

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“As they traveled through our city they were greeted with safe shelter and San Antonio’s welcoming spirit,” Mayor Ron Nirenberg said in a statement. “We should all be proud of the response San Antonio provided these families during their stay.”

The city worked with the San Antonio Food Bank, the Interfaith Welcome Coalition and Catholic Charities to provide drinks, hot meals, clothes, toiletries, toys and medical exams for the migrants.

The center provided more than 84,900 meals, and some 2,800 migrants received medical care.

More than 1,200 city staff members and over 600 community volunteers worked there.

Though the center has closed, the welcome coalition will continue providing aid and arranging bus tickets for a smaller number of migrants released from the border or transported from nearby detention facilities.

The Travis Park Church, which has sheltered people fleeing hur-

ricanes in years past, also opened its doors for the high volume of migrants – more than 22,200 slept there.

It will be closing its overnight shelter, too.

The church’s associate pastor, Gavin Rogers, said the San Antonio Mennonite Church and Catholic Charities have the capacity to house around 20 migrants overnight.

If the number rose above that once again, then he’d likely reopen the church doors.

“Our migrant friends and families added so much to our community with their presence, love, and testimonies,” said Gavin Rogers, associate pastor at Travis Park Church. “They are heroes.”

Because of a provision in this year’s budget deal, the city and its nonprofits were eligible for federal reimbursements for the hundreds of thousands of dollars they spent on humanitarian aid. It requested \$590,000 from the beginning of March to the end of June, and it received \$280,000 in the first reimbursement round.

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