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**ON HIS GAME:** Colts player Antoine Bethea (right) laces a new pair of shoes, donated by Red Wing, for Jamie Frederick. Methodist Sports Medicine doctors also volunteered to do foot exams for homeless men Tuesday.

## FOR THE HOMELESS: NEW SHOES, EXAMS

Dozens of men at Wheeler Mission welcome Soles4Souls aid and volunteer doctors

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Few human body parts are subjected to the harsh treatment that homeless people's feet endure, say the homeless and their advocates.

"Ingrown toenails, corns, the dampness, the cold," said Donnie Robinette, who lived on the streets during the 1980s. "You walk everywhere, and a lot of times the shoes are worn out by the time they get to you, and they don't fit, either."

On Tuesday, dozens of homeless men at Wheeler Mission lined up eagerly for free pairs of new shoes and check-ups by physicians who specialize in treating feet.

Red Wing donated the shoes, and the doctors were volunteers from Methodist Sports Medicine. Their collaboration was arranged by the Nashville, Tenn.-based charity Soles4Souls, which since 2005 has given away more than 5 million pairs of new or nearly new shoes to homeless people.

On Tuesday 109 pairs of shoes were given away. One man was



**CONSULTATION:** Dr. Jonathan Smerek (left), talked Tuesday with one of dozens of homeless men who came for free foot exams at Wheeler Mission. During the event, 109 pairs of shoes also were given away.

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turned away — he wore size 15 double-wide and could not be accommodated.

Fungus-infected toenails were

a common sight among the men, but the most distressed feet might have been William Vaughter's. His nails resembled talons; they were so long that despite their thickness, they were twisted and grew upward.

» See Shoes, Page A19

## Shoes

» "It kills me to walk," said William Vaughter, 73; he had calluses.

From A17

Vaughter, 73, said trimming them with conventional toenail clippers was impossible.

Far more bothersome than the nails, Vaughter said, are the sores on the bottoms of his feet. "It kills me to walk," he said, "like having a rock up in your feet." Vaughter said he walks about 10 miles a day.

He winced as the doctor poked his feet. "I had a guy tell me they were bunions," Vaughter told the doctor, Jonathan Smerek. Smerek said they were calluses, and they should be dug out. Vaughter said he'd take care of it.

There was no time for such a procedure Tuesday. Smerek and one colleague, David Porter, worked for two hours, each physician averaging 28 patients an hour.

They urged the men to take better care of their feet, to wash them daily and keep their toenails clipped and their skin moisturized with lotion.

The men nodded, but they've been given that advice before. Podiatrists routinely come to the Wheeler to treat them. "If there's a common denominator (among the homeless), it's foot problems," said Gene Green, Wheeler's director.

Charles "Corky" Hall, 47, said he tries to keep his feet clean, "but sometimes that just doesn't work out. The problem is all the walking, just being on your feet all the



ROBERT SOEHR / The Star

**SHAKE ON IT:** Phillip Stewart (left), who came for a foot exam and new shoes Tuesday, shook hands with Colts defensive back Antoine Bethea, who helped fit shoes.

time."

The men were barefoot as they waited for their new socks and shoes.

Some of the fitting was done by Antoine Bethea, a Colts defensive back who was on a goodwill mission. Bethea worked hands-on. He introduced himself to the men and then knelt on the floor and slipped the socks, then the shoes,

over their feet. Then he laced the shoes and tied the laces.

"I've never seen a homeless person's feet that close-up," Bethea said afterward. "I've had messed-up feet, too."

"If your feet hurt, that makes your day that much longer."

★ Call Star reporter Will Higgins at (317) 444-6043.

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Indianapolis Colts defensive back Antoine Bethea, who helped out Tuesday at Wheeler Mission