

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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LADY LUCK IS LOOKING UP *A Winning Round For Houseless Women* **By Wanda Sue Parrott**

If homelessness in Monterey County could be converted to Frank Loesser's 1950 smash hit Broadway musical "Guys and Dolls," the song from Act II would have stolen the show with its winning hand on Aug. 18 at Monterey City Hall.

Imagine character Nathan Detroit intoning *Luck be a lady tonight* before the public addressed City Council. The outcome couldn't have been better if they were playing to break the bank! Council voted yes unanimously, and everyone was a winner—especially women!

Monterey's Lucky Ladies

It's no secret that women, not only homeless of all ages but older ladies on very limited incomes, are underserved in Monterey County. They have been the silent, all-but-ignored minority—the mothers, grandmothers, co-workers, and friends--until the spotlight started to focus on such women about three years ago, culminating in the unanimous Yes vote by Monterey City Council last week to allow sleeping in cars to be legal, with some restrictions which include: no alcohol, no drugs and no mental illnesses allowed.

No one spoke out in opposition to the ordinance that council passed unanimously in an amazing turnabout from the city's former position of 2013 that criminalized sleeping in cars.

One Starfish Wins Unanimous Approval

Approved was an ordinance allowing a program to be administered through One Starfish Safe Parking and Supportive Services, which operates as a mission of non-profit Pass the Word Ministry. It is an 18-month pilot program that will depend for support of businesses, churches and other organizations willing to participate, and will start by allowing safe parking for six vehicles at the United Methodist Church on Soledad Dr., Monterey.

Purpose of One Starfish is to help people living in vehicles move back into permanent housing, recover their footing financially, and provide health care access. One Starfish is currently operating one parking lot in Pacific Grove, one in Seaside, and two in unincorporated spots in Carmel. (An in-depth report will follow in this column in September.)

Men can be included, but the need for safe shelter for women was the selling point of the public pleadings symbolized by the Guys and Dolls' lyrics: *Luck be a Lady tonight*.

Spinning The Homeless Wheel Of Fortune

According to Tia Sukin, founder and director of One Starfish, of the 18 guests who stayed more than three months during One Starfish's first year, 11 moved to new housing and nine increased their incomes, so luck was combined with good fortune through loving efforts of mostly women helping women. She said 88 percent were women, 39 percent of whom were 62 or older.

Julia Esther Castillo testified about living in her car for eight months. "Thanks to them, I was able to put my life back together." Castillo said most guests are female and function as a community-watch group by keeping their phones handy.



Inspired by lyrics from the 1951 song "Wheel of Fortune" by Bennie Benjamin and George David Weiss, and turned into a best-selling hit in 1952 by Kay Starr's Capitol Records recording, Monterey's women have demonstrated that the old pop song is a powerful modern-day hymn praising wonders wrought by women helping women:

*Oh, wheel of fortune, I'm hoping somehow
If you'll ever smile on me, please, let it be now.*

Love Outlasts Legislation

The secret of the women's success? Acting Now with Persistence. Such love outlived drawn-out legislation that kept sleeping in one's car illegal, even if that car was parked in the sleeper's own driveway!

Kelli J. Keane, 82, testified about her life-changing experience through One Starfish. One of the first three women accepted, she got help from the non-profit's social worker, who found her affordable housing. "I am now living in a 200-square-foot one-room studio," she said. "It's like a palace to me!"

Councilman Ed Smith expressed concern about persons with criminal backgrounds getting into the One Starfish program; consequently, an online criminal background check is required as part of the intake process. Research is being done into the least expensive way to perform limited background research for past criminal behavior, which delayed the time Monterey's homeless population can apply for One Starfish until October.

Four Queens And Two Aces



Comparing life to a Guys and Dolls type card game, homeless women of the Monterey Peninsula now hold a winning hand: four queens and two aces. The ace is the high card, symbolized by the Fund for Homeless Women, co-founded almost five years ago by Marian Penn, Kathy Whilden and Rev. Michael Reid, who brought attention to the local homeless-women crisis.

Fund for Homeless Women recently received \$150,000 from an anonymous donor. It is a field-of-interest fund of the Community Foundation of Monterey County which gives grants to the four queens in the winning hand of women who are forging changes that legislators cannot ignore.

Queen of Hearts: *The Friends of Homeless Women*—a coalition of service providers, volunteers, business persons and friends interested in social justice for women, which meets the last Wed. of each month at St. Mary's by the Sea Episcopal Church, Pacific Grove, 10:30 a.m. Contact Kathy Whilden at wildini@aol.com.

Queen of Diamonds: *One Starfish Safe Parking and Support Services Program*—A safe place to sleep for those who live in vehicles. onestarfishsafeparking@gmail.com.

Queen of Clubs: *The Gathering Place*—A refuge for unsheltered women. Tues.at the Moose Club, 555 Canyon Del Rey Rd., Del Rey Oaks, Tues., 11:30 a.m.– 1:30 p.m. Provides free lunch, clothing, feminine hygiene and other personal items, including vouchers for gasoline, laundry and showers. Call 831-241-6154.:

Queen of Spades: *I-HELP for Women*. Coming in November, this Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program (that has provided overnight shelter and a meal every night for the past 23 years at 33 community houses of worship to 30 homeless men) will begin offering the same program for women. Contact Karen Araujo at WeHelpIHELP@gmail.com.

Ace up the Sleeve: Thanks to Cedar Street Times' publisher-editor Marge Ann Jameson who dedicates a full page to homeless issues every week at her own expense. She needs an ad sales representative to bring in revenue to help support her worthy work. If experienced, interested, and willing, please contact Marge Ann at editor@cedarstreettimes.com.

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