

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #157

Homeless Hotspots—Part 6



A homeless hotspot is any place unsheltered people hang in or hang out in order to hang on.

IS “BLUE BIRD” HEALTHCARE A HINT OF HOMELESS TOWN URBAN RENEWAL?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

IDENTIFYING the Fremont/Canyon Del Rey intersection as prime hotspot where local under-housed people gather kicked off this series. If you're curious about why, consider these facts:

To the casual passerby, it's the tourism industry's landmark border where Seaside, Monterey and Del Rey Oaks meet. But to those who live in and around the intersection, it's the unofficial city center of Monterey Peninsula's version of Homeless Town. Why?

Across from Safeway. Laguna Grande Park is Homeless Town's residential district.

On both sides of Fremont Blvd., Seaside's restaurant row, where homeless persons rummage through trash cans seven days a week, and women are fed on Mondays at Burger King.

On the west side in Walgreen's parking lot, a revolution in health care is under way.

Is this indicative of subtle urban renewal?

Pay heed!

Revelation By A Trash Picker

I thank a thirty-something immigrant I'll call Jose for setting me straight about the significance of this intersection. Here's how it happened:

Last Monday night, while hauling my trash bins to the street for Seaside's Tuesday-morning pickup, a shadowy figure swiftly rounded the corner on his bicycle.

I recognized him as one of Seaside's trash pickers. They never enter private property, but freely help themselves to curbside discards.

I always put my recyclable water bottles in a separate plastic sack that hangs on a fence post for easy pick up. On Tuesday morning, both sack and bottles are always gone.

Until this week, I'd never spoken to one of the trash pickers, but now I said hello to the young man in a baseball cap.

He slowed to a stop. In polite broken English he asked, "Do you have any recyclables?"

I handed over my small collection of seven plastic bottles.

"Muchas gracias. Things are now very bad for my business."

"What business is that?" I asked.

"Recyclables," he said, explaining that since the recycling center in the Safeway parking lot recently closed, he must take his collections to Salinas to sell them.

"You carry bags of empty bottles to Salinas on your bicycle?"

"Oh, no. I fill big sacks and then a friend takes me in his truck."

Jose waved goodbye and rode on to the next set of trash cans.

Cash-And-Carry Street Banking

The flashbulb in my mind lit up. The recycling operation at Safeway had been the financial center of the peninsula's unofficial Homeless Town.

The loss of the recycling center could be, to the homeless and needy, as devastating as the bank crash of 1929 was to all Americans.

I thought of Safeway as I remembered entering it from Fremont Ave. Until Jose illuminated me, I hadn't missed the large boxcar surrounded by throngs of people with plastic bags that filled the pavement under the Black Bear Diner's parking lot. Now I remembered dozens of poor folks standing in long queues. When they reached the front of the line, they exchanged their recyclables for a few cents per bottle the way bank clients approach the teller's window to withdraw pocket cash from their accounts.

I thought, "The recycling center operators were the equivalent of countless underprivileged or homeless people's bank tellers who dispensed cash and carry money."

"Omigod," I admitted. "They vanished and I didn't even notice they were gone!"

Did you?

When God Closes A Door

A memorable line from the movie "The Sound of Music" popped into mind. The sister superior said, "When God closes a door, He opens a window."

Metaphorically, it means when something good vanishes, something new appears.

And so it came to pass that as of Sept. 28, 2017, there came to another of the four corners of the Fremont/Canyon Del Rey intersection something akin to a miracle.

A big blue bus named Blue Bird opened to welcome and serve much-needed health care.

The Big Bus Named Blue Bird

Every Thurs. from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., the homeless will be welcome in the parking lot of Walgreens, 1055 Fremont Blvd., Seaside as the first location of Montage Health Care's Mobile Clinic serving the homeless in Monterey County.

Staffed by a nurse practitioner, clinicians and volunteers, the former Bloodmobile bus will offer treatment for sore throats, earaches, coughs, sinus issues, minor skin, wound and urinary infections.

Other services will include diabetes and blood pressure screenings and treatment.

Montage Health, parent company of Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, is committed to making a positive impact on healthcare delivery to community members who otherwise have limited access to healthcare.

At least on Thursdays, the homeless will reappear!

For details see www.montagehealth.org/mobileclinic.

Thanks for supporting last week's Books for Beds benefit. Others will follow!

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