

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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**Bicycle  
Contraptions:  
Harbingers of  
Homelessness?**



### MONTEREY'S HOMELESS REVOLUTION

By Wanda Sue Parrott

*“Greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come.”*

*Victor Hugo (1802-1885)*

**BEFORE HOMELESSNESS** was identified as a burgeoning blight across the U.S., it had to be acknowledged. Here on the Monterey Peninsula, aka “Paradise,” dawning of the Age of Homeless Awareness is depicted on this hypothetical Hometown Calendar:

#### **B.C. – (1981 through 2009)**

This era started after President Ronald Reagan released mental patients onto the streets; it evolved into recent recognition that American-style homelessness was increasingly apparent through customized Bicycle Contraptions defined as “extraordinary and unusual attachments beyond normal baskets, flashlights, bells and flashers, and/or book, bag and box carriers.”

By 2009, homeless persons were distinguishable from ordinary cyclists by such attachments as long carts piled with clothing, bedding, tents and tarpaulins; also, side-saddle bags filled with food, papers, tools and personal items like combs, brushes, cosmetics, soap and other personal items.

People-haulers shaped like stand-in trash bins or two-wheel cabs trailed behind bicycles. Baby carriers were hooded and waterproof; besides infants, they also pulled dogs, files, computers, sleeping bags, musical instruments, and groceries.

When propped up against a wall, dumpster, trash can or bench, a bicycle that carried its owner's worldly possessions by day served as a frame over which a rainproof cloth was thrown to form a makeshift shelter at night. Or, when a sleeping bag was unloaded, an individual reclined on his flatbed cart.

Bicycle Contraptions weren't the only local signs of burgeoning homelessness, but in an area where the Prius, Mercedes-Benz and Lexus prevail, they were unmistakable evidence that could no longer be ignored.

### **P.A. – (2010 through 2012)**

This is a brief cusp of Problem Acknowledgment in which city, county, state and national leaders—as well as the public in local communities across the Monterey Peninsula—awoke collectively in the realization that “Oh oh! Homelessness is growing like kudzu vines and we’d better act before it chokes out the flowers in our Garden of Eden!” (P.A. also stands for the private shock wave of Personal Alarm.)

### **A.D. – (2013 through 2015)**

This is the new age of Action Development, aka “putting the local think tank to work.” French writer Victor Hugo described A.D. in his ode to revolution as “an idea whose time has come.” He believed a timely idea is more potent than military might. He was right.

### **Pacific Grove’s Amazing Challenge Grant**

Action development is ongoing throughout Monterey County as private, governmental, and public agencies mobilize to fend off the implicate forecast of greater homelessness as foreshadowed in February on National Public Radio: 49 percent of all American families now live from paycheck to paycheck.

According to *Care2 Business* (Dec. 2014): there are 24 empty houses for every homeless man, woman and child in the United States.

Here in Monterey, where affordable housing is minimal, the impending homeless revolution is as disparate as it is desperate. What to do?

Two Pacific Grove city councilmen tested Victor Hugo’s great-idea philosophy last year. Ken Cuneo joined idea-originator Rudy Fischer in formulating a Homeless Challenge Grant that resulted in creation of the Regional City Homelessness Committee that celebrates its first anniversary this week.

Fischer recalls that late in 2013 he attended several breakfasts and meetings where the needs of the homeless were discussed. “I saw there were people dedicated to helping these (homeless) people, but there were limited resources to support them.”

During a phone conversation with Monterey city councilman Alan Haffa, Fischer says he “started to form the idea of what could be accomplished with donations if every city on the Peninsula gave even a little bit.” At that time, the PG and Monterey city managers were also discussing what the cities could do to address the issue. “That started me thinking about what amount of money it would take to make a difference.”

Fischer checked with service providers to determine how much money would be required to make a difference. “Even a small amount would be a big help to all of them,” he says. “They have dedicated people who want to help, but just need more money.”

In February 2014, councilmen Fischer and Cuneo presented the PG city council with their Homeless Grant Challenge proposal, which basically asked the city to pledge \$1 per resident to be used to help fund services for the homeless, provided at least three other cities on the peninsula would join PG by committing to the challenge.

“To my delight, they were immediately receptive to the idea,” Fischer says “To my dismay, they voted to authorize Ken and me to do the work of approaching the other cities. That started a very long, arduous process of investigating the issue further, putting together presentations, and getting on multiple city council agendas to make our pitch over the course of many months.”

Fischer and Cuneo hoped to raise \$100,000 if all the cities and county cooperated. They made their first \$1 Homeless Matching Challenge Grant pitch on March 4, 2014. Their appearance before Monterey City Council resulted in a YES commitment. Over the next few months, San Jose and Carmel committed. Seaside, which

participated without paying through council member Dave Pacheco's attendance at meetings, tabled the Challenge Grant for reconsideration at its mid-year review on Feb. 19.

A total of \$49,000 was raised, and last September the first Regional City Homelessness Committee's grant money was awarded.

Recipients were: \$15,000--One Starfish Safe Parking Program for women living in vehicles; \$20,000—I-HELP, The Gathering Place and Good Samaritan Center, to work collaboratively on programs to benefit women; \$5,000—The Fund for Homeless Women; \$5,000—the Coalition of Homeless Service Providers to help fund their biennial homeless census. The \$5,000 balance went into a contingency fund.

Rudy Fischer says about his idea whose time had come, "I'm not sure the Homeless Challenge Grant idea is done yet." Seaside—which has the largest homeless and residential populations on the Monterey Peninsula but lowest per-capita income—is committed to addressing homeless. However, it is still undecided about how to best commit funding, so the Homeless Challenge Grant was again tabled in February.

Final vote is expected at the Seaside City Council meeting on March 19.

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Photo of Rudy Fischer from his website, <https://rudyfischer.com/>; bicycle contraption photos from Google Free Photo web search; no copyright infringement intended.

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