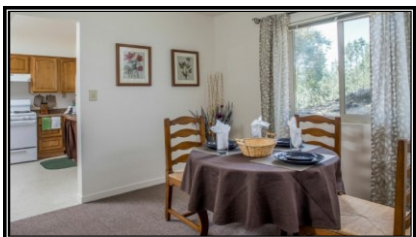


## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

March 20, 2015

### Column #21



### WOMEN IN TRANSITION

*'Twas the Luck of the Irish for 12 Homeless Lasses*

By Wanda Sue Parrott



**SURE AND BEGORRA**, there was more than a wee touch of Leprechaun Magic in Marina during St. Patrick's birthday week, and you might have had a taste of it yourself.

The big celebration started with the cutting of a green ribbon at 12:30 p.m. on Thurs., March 12 in renovated former government housing, in a eucalyptus grove known as Lexington Court, on a hilltop in old Fort Ord.

Now owned and operated by Shelter Outreach Plus, Monterey County's largest provider of homeless housing and emergency shelter beds, the building contains six two-bedroom, 1 bath units.

The apartments will house twelve formerly homeless single women making the transition back to self-sufficiency and independence through the Women in Transition (WIT) Program.

Financial support was received from the Community Foundation of Monterey's Fund for Homeless Women. WIT will provide individualized case management, life skills counseling and other essential services, along with housing for six months, one year or even 18 months.

The ribbon-cutting, which formally launched the opening of Women in Transition, was accompanied by tours of the apartments creatively furnished and elegantly decorated by supportive partners from Sotheby's International Realty, whose airy, light touches were like fairy stardust sparkling at noon.

### Sleep Is The First Sign Of Recovery.

*--Irish Proverb*

Reyes Bonilla, executive director of Shelter Outreach Plus, said, "The unfortunate reality is there are simply not enough beds to serve the twenty-five hundred plus women, men, and children who are homeless each night in Monterey County."

According to the 2013 Homeless Census, between 300 and 350 women were sleeping in vehicles on the streets of the Monterey Peninsula each night. Statistics from the 2015 Point in Time Homeless Census will be released in May. Unofficial statistics indicate there could now be as many as 7,000 homeless children in Monterey County.

Although various services exist in Monterey County for women with mental health issues, women who are victims of violence or other abuse, or women with children, no facilities provided safe shelter or affordable housing specifically for single women, particularly women past fifty, until last September.

Then, One Starfish Safe Parking Program began offering safe overnight parking for women who slept in their vehicles in church parking lots. A social worker with One Starfish has helped several women find housing and employment.

Plans are proceeding for launching I-HELP for women. The Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program will allow 25-30 homeless women to rotate among the 30 participating Monterey Peninsula houses of worship that now provide dinner and sleeping space each night of the month to homeless men.

The new 12-bed WIT program opened five days before St. Pat's traditional March 17 birthday, usually celebrated with corned beef, cabbage and green beer. At WIT no beer is allowed. To qualify for WIT participation, women must agree to share an apartment with a roommate, to abstain from smoking and using drugs, and to consume no alcohol.

The lucky ladies began moving in on Mon., March 16. Out of cars and trucks came blankets, pillows, bundles of clothing, cell phones. Into their own new spaces went boxes to be unpacked and sorted.

Books, beads, earrings, photos of loved ones, favorite bath oils, toothbrushes, face creams and hair brushes—all are items taken for granted by girls who were never homeless, but treasures to those starting the comeback process beginning with a long hot shower, washing your hair, and having coffee with cinnamon toast followed by a nap in your own fluffy new bed.

*May you always have work for your hands to do.  
May your pockets hold always a coin or two.  
May the sun shine bright on your windowpane.  
May the rainbow be certain to follow each rain.  
May the hand of a friend always be near you.  
And may God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.  
--Irish Blessing*

Reyes Bonilla said, "Despite the fiscal challenges we face as a non-profit, we have been fortunate enough to obtain much of the resources needed to operate the WIT and other programs. Unfortunately, additional resources are needed to operate WIT, but we believe we will raise the resources through the generosity of our partners and the local community."

At Shelter Outreach Plus, the "Bed Night" cost to house one person for one night is now \$25, as compared to \$24 last year, so SOP ended St. Patrick's Week with a Bed Night Campaign that placed hot wings on its menu.

On Thurs., March 19, at Buffalo Wild Wings in Seaside, ten percent of the pre-taxed sale price was donated to Community Homeless Solutions for every customer who mentioned Shelter Outreach Plus.

This Bed Night event was a kickoff to generate \$200,000 by the end of the year, before which time Shelter Outreach Plus plans to change its name to Community Homeless Solutions. Details will follow in a future column.

To make contributions or for further information, contact 831-384-3388 or [info@shelteroutreachplus.org](mailto:info@shelteroutreachplus.org)

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Photos from Shelter Outreach Plus; shamrock from Google Clipart. Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at Books for Beds by leaving a message with The Yodel Poet at 831-899-5887 or e-mail [amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com](mailto:amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com).