

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

October 25-31, 2019

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 2



Doris Beckman

IS HIGH RENT FORCING YOU TOWARD HOMELESSNESS?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

ACCORDING to the 2019 Executive Summary of the Monterey County Homeless Census & Survey, 2,422 homeless persons were counted as living in Monterey County last January. If it's true that 1/5 of them live in campers, trucks, vans and cars, as reported in last week's column, where do the remaining 4/5 stay? Especially the seniors?

In Seaside, several homeless women camp on bus benches along Fremont Blvd. They're recognizable by their shopping carts and heaped trash bags.

Families live in Laguna Grande Park, and addicts snooze and snort at Roberts Lake.

Recent warnings ran on Next Door about a red-haired homeless woman who occupies an MST bench in the Monterey/Seaside area. She wields a sharp knife and threatened someone who tried to approach her.

Who are these women, each of whom is a loner? Or the men who shoot up and sleep it off? They're in the community, but not part of it!

What about those seniors who love community, but are alone, whether housed or homeless? Forty-three percent of Monterey County seniors surveyed expressed concern about social isolation.

One-fifth of adults over 75 reported having contact with another person less than once a week; one in ten saw a visitor less than once a month.

Loneliness can be deadly. Are you lonely?

Healthy People Can Be Homeless

As homelessness becomes openly evident, its presence is increasingly difficult for cities to sidestep; lack of affordable housing exists in every city on the Monterey Peninsula.

Not all individuals in need of housing are currently living in tents on the beach or in parks, nor forced to sleep on benches in public places, and not everyone who faces homelessness is mentally ill, hooked on drugs or even unsheltered.

Candidates for homelessness include everyone whose incomes are shrinking as so-called fair-market value of rent skyrockets above their ability to pay.

Average social security is \$1,055 per month; average rent for a 1-bedroom apartment ranges from \$1,500 to \$2,500 per month, depending on whether the renter lives in Seaside or Pacific Grove.

Experts say 1/3 of one's income should be allocated to rent. So, that means the individual living on \$1,055 social security should pay no more than \$350 per month rent.

\$350 here on the Monterey Peninsula? No way!! Well. . . maybe. . .

Saved By Covia?

Covia is a 50+-year-old non-profit service organization that promotes well-being by building strong and engaging communities, connecting people with the services they need to thrive, and providing compassionate personalized support.

Canterbury Woods in Pacific Grove is part of Covia, whose motto is: Live well and age well—anywhere you call home.

Covia is currently seeking funding to open offices in Monterey County so it can bring its Home Match program to our area.

Doris Beckman of Marina, founder of Golden Connections service, now represents Covia, whose Home Match Community Service began in the Bay Area; Covia's corporate headquarters are in Walnut Creek.

Doris explains that Covia Home Match brings homeowners who are willing to open their homes to well-screened homemates together with potential renters of rooms or accessory dwelling units at reasonable rent.

A process of careful vetting matches homeowners with potential renters who will become housemates and, hopefully, friendly helpmates who take the edge off loneliness while enabling a homeowner to keep the property he or she might otherwise have lost.

In seeking to expand into Monterey County, Covia cites these facts:

- 73 percent of older adults are homeowners;
- 57 percent of older adult renters are cost-burdened (rent exceeds 30 percent of their income);
- 7,386 homes are needed by 2023.

Overview of Covia's proposed local Home Match funding and staffing includes two offices, one in North County Coastal/Greater Monterey Peninsula, and Greater Salinas/Central Salinas Valley, with additional office hours or intake events at trusted centers for older adults and/or community members.

Each office will have one staff member who manages a portfolio of home managers/home seekers. Covia seeks funding per year for the project that will include:

- A 3-year pilot test for either 25-30 (\$250,000/year) or 50-60 (\$350,000/year) matches in which homeowners open their homes to sharing with other(s) needing affordable housing.
- Staff to include a Program Director and/or Program Manager; Outreach/Intake Coordinator(s).
- Staff will conduct home visits and in-person interviews; facilitate the matching process; moderate creation of the Living Together Agreement.

How You Can Get Involved

If you want to discuss opening your home through home-sharing, or you're contemplating finding a new home for yourself through a home-share program like Covia offers, or to discuss making a contribution, call Doris Beckman at 831-601-4584.

Representatives from Covia will visit the peninsula on Wednesday, October 30, meeting with Tyller Williamson of Monterey City Council and following up with a presentation to Pacific Grove City Council at 7 p.m. You may attend the meeting or watch it on Channel 25.

For further details about Covia, call 925-956-7400 or visit www.covia.org.

A program like Covia's Home Match probably will not resolve the problem of homeless persons who prefer to sleep on beaches or benches, but it helps prevent future homelessness among 1,000 Californians the Monterey County Department of Social Services estimates will turn 65 every day for the next 15 years.

Did you know Monterey County's senior population is predicted to be 24 percent of the total population by 2020? That's three months from now. How, and where, will you be living then?

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This column appears in the weekly edition of Cedar Street Times at www.cedarstreettimes.com.

Photo: Doris Beckman represents Covia, whose motto "Live well and age well, anywhere you call home" promotes home sharing.

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