

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

February 14-20, 2020

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 17



WHAT HAPPENS TO HOMELESS WOMEN AFTER REV. MICHAEL REID RETIRES?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

REREADING Part 15 of this series raises the question: Was naming Rev. Michael Reid recipient of the first Earth Angel Award a coincidence or clairvoyance in action?

If you recall, that headline asked: "What happens when earth angels' wings start to drag?"

How to rekindle interest in volunteerism was the topic of the discussion hosted by Friends of Homeless Women, the outreach arm of the Fund for Homeless Women.

Most of the 35-40 participants were professional volunteers from the Gathering for Women, the non-profit refuge for homeless women now located at 147 Eldorado St., Monterey.

GFW was started more than 5 years ago by a handful of women who met at Friends of Homeless Women meetings; on Jan. 27 they shared ideas about waning interest as volunteers and offered answers to the question of how to replace the thinning ranks of women dedicated to helping others of their gender who may be in need of shelter and services.

No one asked what will happen to homeless women after the Rev. Michael Reid leaves.

He's the former pastor from St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Pacific Grove whose idea for an effort to help homeless women ignited the flame of interest that created the Fund for Homeless Women. Volunteers Marian Penn and Kathy Whilden joined forces with him to kick it off.

The Fund for Homeless Women has subsequently raised more than \$1 million to help the estimated 500-700 homeless women on the Monterey Peninsula where the Gathering for Women has become the most visible non-profit to have evolved.

“Michael” (as everyone calls the Founding Father) gave a brief, emotional speech that closed the Jan. 27 meeting and which inspired me to name him the Earth Angel Award recipient.

Two days later, before the column was published, I got a surprise email announcing Michael’s retirement and forthcoming move to New Mexico. No mention was made at the Jan. 27 meeting!

Coincidence or clairvoyance? It’s your call.

So, What Comes Next?

What happens to homeless women and /or their fund after the Rev. Michael Reid departs?

That can depend on women advocates in the community who succeed him, starting with Kathy Whilden and Marian Penn, co-founders of the Friends of Homeless Women, the outreach arm of the Fund for Homeless Women.

Next, there’s Mary Eileen Kiniry, R.N., who originated the idea of a professional corps of volunteers to be the backbone of today’s Gathering for Women.

Their plans will be announced once I know what they are.

It’s Now Up To The Women

In the community-at-large, Jane Parker, County of Monterey’s District 4 Supervisor since 2008, has consistently championed housing and help for the under-addressed homeless women of Monterey County.

Jane’s office is at 2616 First Ave., Marina, where 15 vehicles have been legally camping overnight in her county office parking lot for two years. This first-of-its-kind local project, operated by Orphan Productions as the One Starfish Safe Parking Program, is phasing out as Jane prepares to retire March 3; the homeless guests are relocating to Seaside.

Jane’s aide for the past decade, Wendy Root Askew, is running for the District 4 supervisor’s seat. If elected, she and District 5 incumbent Mary Adams will form a force I like to call “les femmes fatale.”

Awesome? You bet! So is Wendy, who says, “I am uniquely qualified and ready to hit the ground running as the next supervisor for District 4 representing the communities of Sand City, Del Rey Oaks, Marina, East Garrison, CSUMB, Salinas and Seaside.

Wendy In A Nutshell

“So, who are you in a nutshell,” I asked. “I know you’re 42, live in Marina and have a young son.”

Wendy said, “I’ve worked closely with every District 4 community as a County Legislative Analyst and MPUSD School Board member.”

“I mean you. Wendy. I know you’re a candidate. What don’t I know about you?”

“Did you know that I am a Pacific Grove High School graduate? My favorite places in PG include the soccer field where I started the first girls’ soccer team in 1994!”

“How’d you wangle that?”

“I was the only girl on the boys’ team my freshman year, got some girlfriends to come out and join me on the boys’ team my sophomore year, and started our very first girls’ team my junior year!”

“Why are you running for your remarkable 4th-District mentor Jane Parker’s seat?”

“I look forward to continuing this work--with and for the community--to keep our communities safe, spur living-wage job creation, and address the housing needs of current residents and future generations.”

Meet The Candidates COPA-Style

You can meet and hear Wendy, and other candidates for the 4th District County Board of Supervisors, at a Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action (COPA) forum on Sunday, Feb. 16, 3-5 p.m., at Martin Luther King Elementary School, 1713 Broadway, Seaside.

COPA consists of 28 organizations, mostly churches, whose members tell their stories and seek commitment on specific issues of community urgency.

The public is welcome to attend. Translators will be present.

What's Next?

So, what's on Jane Parker's post-supervisor-cum-earth-angel agenda?

Maybe she'll volunteer to treat our community's homeless women to her culinary art. Before Jane became an Earth Angel—aka Outstanding Public Servant—she earned a Grand Diplome de Cuisine from La Varenne Ecole de Cuisine in Paris and, early in her career, founded and managed a healthy meal preparation service designed to serve working families.

Rev. Michael Reid, recipient of the other Earth Angel Award, will be honored at a special event in March that will be covered in next week's column.

Meanwhile, Mary Adams, unopposed in the race for the Monterey County Board of Supervisors 5th District, says:

“Wendy would work closely with me to continue the advances we have made since my election, in ensuring transparency, openness, and accessibility to all residents. Having two women on the Board of Supervisors has been transformative in the decision-making of our board.”

That's neither coincidental nor clairvoyant; it's a fact!

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