

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

September 4-10, 2020

### IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 45



*sweet dreams can come true  
casa de noche buena  
means house of good night  
by late november  
homeless families may sleep  
in this dream-come-true  
seaside's first shelter  
will serve children and their folks  
mostly homeless moms*

### HOW TO STOP BOONDOGLING AND START BUILDING DREAMS

By Wanda Sue Parrott

**DREAMING** works. If dream-builders know what they're doing, they can convert boondoggles into goals, as proven by the progress toward opening of the peninsula's first homeless shelter in Seaside in November.

For example, remember when veteran Seaside city councilmember Dave Pacheco and newly installed councilmember Jon Wizard co-sponsored a "Homeless by the Bay" town hall in Feb. 2019? It drew an estimated 160 people to Oldemeyer Center on a cold, drab night.

A long line of attendees aired 3-minute views of a potential homeless shelter in the abandoned mobile unit that once was a health clinic behind Monterey County Department of Public Social Services on Olympia Ave.

#### **To Be Or Not To Be The "Olympia Shelter?"**

Headline of my Feb. 22, 2019 column was "Move over, Oscar—'Homeless by the Bay' Wins Best Performance Award!" Theatrics, histrionics and old-fashioned opining prevailed, as the public rallied, ranted and railed (more against than for a shelter in their own backyard).

One elder recalled before Fort Ord closed in 1994, "I was a kid. . . that area was known as The Pit. . . there was drug deals going down. . . there were shootings. . . dead bodies were lying all around. . . what'ya wanta do? Bring back what the city worked so hard to get rid of?"

Another resident suggested, "Use the building, but since it is mobile, move it somewhere elsewhere, like Fort Ord or Marina."

Emotions ran high and the reason the town hall was convened was fuzzied in the fray. Money! To qualify for its share of the well-publicized \$12.5 million in HEAP continuum of care funding, should Seaside convert the unused unit into a homeless shelter? If Seaside did not respond in the next few weeks, the chance to qualify for the funding would evaporate.

Everyone in attendance knew such a shelter was needed, but no one wanted it in their own backyard. Councilmembers Pacheco and Wizard held the town hall because Seaside City Council was slated to further discuss the issue on Thurs., Feb. 21. They listened intently to what the public had to say.

Three people focused specifically on a goal, thus planting a thought seed from which future possibilities could and did grow:

### **Housing Homeless Women**

I was the first advocate for women. I explained the mobile unit is on County of Monterey property within the city limits of Seaside, so Seaside is not the owner. Second, by partnering with the County of Monterey and City of Seaside, Gathering for Women could further expand its services to the 600 then-currently estimated homeless women on the Monterey Peninsula.

Next speaker was Kelli J. Keane, 86-year old Advocate for Senior Women Without Housing, a formerly homeless woman who lived in her van while helping establish Gathering for Women and One Starfish Safe Parking.

Third speaker was Gathering for Women's brand new interim executive director, Kate Daniels Kurz, who was well-prepared to back up her pro-women's shelter advocacy with statistics from 2018:

- GFW served 932 individual homeless women;
- 1,900 showers were taken by homeless women;
- 10,237 meals were served to homeless women;
- 4,492 women visited the clothes closet where they were given free clothing.

Someone shouted, "It sounds like a done deal!" Councilmembers Pacheco and Wizard assured the audience that nothing was a done deal.

Later, when Robin McCrae, Director of Community Human Services, joined forces with GFW's Kate Daniels Kurz to present to Seaside City Council their plan for serving as co-partner sponsors of the proposed shelter, it became a done deal. A year-and-a-half later a formal name of the shelter was announced:

### **Casa De Noche Buena —**

#### **Shelter For Women And Families With Children**

On August 17, 2020, a letter from Amy Sands, board president of Gathering for Women, and Alana Myles, Chair, Community Human Services announced establishment of the Casa de Noche Buena Fund with the Community Foundation for Monterey County. It says:

*"Beginning in November 2020, Casa de Noche Buena will house approximately 30 guests, depending on family size and the ages of the children, for 90 days. . . In addition to a warm, safe place to stay, they will receive supportive services and meals. Our case managers will help guests set goals, connect them to housing, employment, education and benefits, and keep them moving toward securing permanent housing and a brighter future.*

*"We are busy renovating a County building in Seaside with State funding. The state, the County of Monterey, and all of the Peninsula cities are providing a portion of operating funds for the shelter, reflecting our community's understanding that Casa de Noche Buena is truly a regional commitment to this very local humanitarian crisis.*

*"But we will need more than government support to make Casa de Noche Buena a success. Our goal is to raise \$220,000 from individuals and groups within the broad Monterey Peninsula community. To facilitate that, we've established the Casa de Noche Buena Fund with the Community Foundation of Monterey County.*

*". . . And right now, donations will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$110,000, thanks to a generous challenge gift."*

Donations for 1<sup>st</sup> year operation funding may be mailed to The Community Foundation for Monterey County, 2354 Garden Rd., Monterey, CA 93940. Mark checks “Casa Shelter Fund.”

To see photos of the renovation and virtual groundbreaking visit [Facebook.com/Casa De NocheBuena](https://www.facebook.com/CasaDeNocheBuena) .

Focusing on a goal makes a dream come true.

Money helps, too.

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Credits: Photo courtesy of The Community Foundation of Monterey County.

Triple haiku by Wanda Sue Parrott

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About this Column: “Homeless in Paradise” is a free public service self-funded and produced by the author. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this column appears regularly on the last week of each month in the Cedar Street Times at [www.cedarstreettimes.com](http://www.cedarstreettimes.com) (and as periodic FLASH columns like this one).

It also appears on Facebook, in Next Door and on private email lists. If interested in being added to the list, submit your request to the contact info below.)

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Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at 831-899-5887, [amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com](mailto:amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com)