

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #32 – Part 2



FIELDS OF DREAMS FOR TINY HOMES

By Wanda Sue Parrott

Tomorrow's building motto: Think small, build big, go solar!

FACING HOMELESSNESS, a Cedar Street Times reader I'll call Annie left this urgent message on The Yodel Poet answering machine last week: "If you give me contact information for people who provide tiny homes, I'll live in one and put my stuff in storage while I'm finding another place."

Annie recently received notice to vacate the apartment where she has lived for twelve years. "There just isn't anything affordable for rent around here. . ." She sounded scared.



Annie's call followed publication of Part One of "Fields of Dreams for Tiny Homes" that featured a KSBW Action News 8 story about Hollister's Mayor Ignacio Velasquez unveiling a 160-sq. ft. prototype microhouse in May.

The one-bedroom unit with compact kitchen, bath and living area cost \$25,000 to produce and is the model for a future village that will help alleviate homelessness in San Benito County. The yellow Hollister micro home, which was incorrectly identified last week as being designed by tiny-homes builder Jay Shafer, features electrical wiring and plumbing.

Its size (bigger than 120 sq. ft.) prevents a model like this from built in local backyards without a property owner going through the legal permitting process.

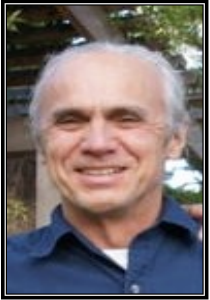
However, the little brown house by Jay Shafer (in the header of this article), founder of Four Lights Tiny House Company, is only 112 sq. ft. People can order the plans for \$499 and use the structures as extra closets, backyard offices, workshops, playhouses, granny units, vacation cabins, home-school rooms and art studios.

To our knowledge, no such units are currently for rent on the Monterey Peninsula, but that is predicted to change in the foreseeable future. Everything from one-level mobile house parks to high-rise students' dorm rooms and apartment/condominium buildings, predicted to shrink in size, will multiply in number. The new green-tinted motto of the real estate development/development industry will probably be: Think Small, Build Big, Go Solar.

Building and zoning codes will eventually change to accommodate the forthcoming "more units per lot" trend gathering force at grass roots levels through young people who will usher in the Age of Micro Housing by making mini happen in stages.

In San Benito County, middle-school students canvassed the area and concluded that 200 homeless people could be sheltered in a micro-home village.

Here in Monterey County, they're active at Rancho Cielo Youth Campus, 710 Old Stage Rd., Salinas. The non-profit alternative high school was the brainchild of former Judge John M. Phillips who is now a County Supervisor. It combines academic education with job-skills training to non-traditional students, who include probationers and transitional rehab students.



Recently students of the school's Construction Academy completed a series of transitional housing units in traditional size and style. On May 26, eight Rancho Cielo students graduated from the first solar-energy installation project taught by Tony Tersol of Pacific Grove.

Tersol says, "I've been working with Stan Semmel since 2001. We started using the name Applied Solar Energy around that time, in addition to Solex. He installed his first solar panels in 1980 and started doing installations for others in 1982. We design and install solar photovoltaic systems for homes and businesses in the Monterey Bay area."

About a year ago, they were approached about bidding on solar for the Rancho Cielo campus. Tersol says, "I came back with the proposal that instead of our company building their solar, wouldn't it be better to set up a training program?"

Consequently, Tersol began teaching the first-class last fall. It meets half-days on Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. It started with about 15 students; of the eight who received graduation certificates, one was a girl. A total of eight such courses is planned, the ultimate goal being solarization of the whole Rancho Cielo campus.

Funding the approximately \$230,000 program was spearheaded by The Offset Project, a Monterey non-profit that contributed \$7,000. Additional funding was contributed by First Solar of Arizona, and RC Cubed of Capitola, an energy-financing company about which Tersol says:

"Long story short: RC3 is in the middle of a deal to provide solar for some homeless housing... The win/win/win is that we train 'at risk' youth for jobs in the 'new economy', provide solar to lower energy costs for non-profits/churches/schools, and help the climate."

Congressman Sam Farr, keynote speaker at The Offset Project's graduation ceremony, predicted solar power will be so big that some of the graduates of Tony Tersol's class will own their own businesses and even become millionaires.

Susie Brusa, Executive Director of Rancho Cielo, says the school's Construction Academy is interested in mass producing micro houses (with solar panel roofing). For information, contact: www.ranchocieloyc.org

Will Tony Tersol be involved? He says, "If they ask me. I'm busy enough with solar, but have talked to some of the mini-house companies. We had considered selling the 120-sq. ft units, since no permit is required for them to put them in their backyards." For information, contact: <http://www.appliedsolarenergy.org>



Meanwhile, facing homelessness due to lack of available housing is frightening and Annie needs help. Do you know of an affordable apartment, room or mini-home for rent? If yes, call The Yodel Poet and leave a message. I'll be sure she gets it. Pronto!

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Art: (4 photos) Photo of Tony Tersol; Photo of kids on roof at Rancho Cielo
Photo of tiny yellow house, KSBW Action 8; Photo of Jay Shafer's 112-sq. ft. house
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