

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

March 25, 2016

Column #76



### SO, WHAT'S NEWS? *Gossip and gab about what's going on* By Wanda Sue Parrott

**TRYING** to cover the whole homeless scene is a huge challenge. If I use a gossip column approach, good, bad and ongoing haps can be strung together like Christmas lights on a spring green pine. Here's the bad news first.

The long-awaited Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program for Women (I-HELP dinners and overnight shelters for women) finally began in November 2015. It took 23 years to arrive, was given a boost by a grant from the Fund for Homeless Women (a field fund of the Community Foundation for Monterey County) and lasted only four months.

#### I-HELP For Women Fizzles Out

I witnessed my first of two I-HELP for Women dinners at Thanksgiving time. Tablecloths, candlelight, china and silverware highlighted the festive non-alcoholic Sunday feast graciously hosted by teen girls and women of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula. Loving leader was Suzanne Schmidt.

In addition to a traditional family-style holiday meal served to the six I-HELP guests and supervisor, each woman was gifted with her own pajamas, personal toiletries and toothbrushes. Beds in the church sanctuary-turned-dorm were comfortable inflatable mattresses as roomy as twin beds.

Next, UU hosted a Christmas dinner for the I-HELP women. It featured colorful knitted gift caps handmade by Carol Collin. So few I-HELP women attended that we volunteers also got gift hats. Mine is red like fine merlot wine.

Flat mats were on the floor in the entry hall and one woman lay crumpled on hers, sleeping without dining. "She's exhausted," her twin sister said.

"What happened to the other beds?"

"Oh, they went flat."

Notably absent was the 80-something woman wearing lots of rings. She dined beside me in November. She sat in a four-wheeled walker and spoke with a strong French accent. "Where is she?" I asked.

"She dropped out."

"Why?"

"She had too much stuff. It took more than 15 minutes to load all her sacks on the bus and 15 minutes more to unload them each time we moved."

A woman argued, “That’s not why. She wanted to have her shot of whiskey before bed. But alcohol and drugs aren’t allowed in the program,”

“Where is she sleeping? I asked. “It’s freezing at night.”

“On the beach.”

Attendance lagged in January and by February rumors ran rampant that I-HELP for Women needed revamping.

An e-mail from Sandy Larson of Homeless Outreach, dated March 16, confirmed the hearsay. “You may have heard that the Women’s I-HELP program was temporarily closed on March 11 as a result of low participation. The Outreach Unlimited Board is now doing research to refine the program parameters to better meet the needs of the women. They anticipate re-opening in a couple months.”

Three days later an e-mail dated March 19 arrived from Suzanne Schmidt. It said that although it had been one week since the announcement by the Board of Directors for Outreach Unlimited (umbrella organization for I- HELP/Women and Men, and the warming shelter in Monterey) “I regret to inform you that the board will not rescind its decision and the program for women is closed.” She thanked all volunteers.

So that’s the bad news. Now read this!

### **Hoorah For The Lasting Luck Of The Irish**

March 12 celebrated the first anniversary of the Women in Transition program operated by then-Shelter Outreach Plus (now Homeless Community Solutions) in Marina. Six two-bedroom, one-bath units became available to twelve women transitioning from homelessness back to self-sufficiency and independence.

My March 20, 2015 headline announced: “’Twas the Luck of the Irish for 12 Homeless Lasses.” ‘Twas true! While St. Patrick’s Day was celebrated last week, Reyes Bonilla, executive director of Community Homeless Solutions, announced the WIT program was successful and further plans are in the works.

Like I-HELP for Women, the Women in Transition program was funded by a grant from the Fund for Homeless Women (a field fund of the Community Foundation for Monterey County).

### **The Man Whose Idea Manifested Multifold**

So it’s good gossip to report that Father Michael Reid, co-founder of the Fund for Homeless Women along with Kathy Whilden and Marian Penn, received the Outstanding Community Service Award on behalf of the fund at Senator Bill Monning’s annual birthday bash at the Hyatt Regency last Friday. Sen. Monning, who presented the award, turned 65. The Fund for Homeless Women is almost four.

Meanwhile, I’m concerned about women sleeping on the beach. May the symbolism of Easter touch them and I-HELP for Women so that I hear rumors of resurrection or replacement of burned-out lights in the string of local events, you can read the news here first.



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