

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

April 22, 2016

Column #80



*Chinatown 2015; photo by Jay Dunn,
courtesy of Dorothy's Place*

VIEWS ON NEWS

Part 2: Where will Seaside's camper crackdown lead?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

SEEING recent news about Chinatown sweeps prompted several readers to ask, “If the homeless can’t camp in Salinas, where’ll they go?”

“I don’t know.”

“You’ve been to Chinatown?” a world-traveler assumed.

“A friend pointed it out when we drove through Salinas last year.”

“But, it’s only fifteen miles from the peninsula. . .”

“When was the last time you visited Chinatown?”

Her silent shrug shouted: *I tour Rome and Paris, not the slums of Monterey County, but you... you write about the homeless scene.*”

I said, “Not one person I’ve met since I returned to Monterey in 2009 has ever toured Chinatown, except social-justice workers and politicians...”

“So, what was your drive-by impression?”

“A third-world refugee camp. Bikes, trash, disheveled persons, and tents.”

“Like tall tepees or boy scout pup tents?”

“No. Shelters like plastic dog houses that resemble royal blue igloos.”

My friend gasped. “OMG! I wouldn’t want one of those in my backyard. Would you?” Before I could answer, she asked, “Could the peninsula become another Chinatown?”

“Maybe,” I said. “I’ll ask the city halls.” So, I sent a short questionnaire by e-mail.

Meanwhile, Countdown In Chinatown

Jill Allen, executive director of Dorothy's Place in Chinatown, predicted at the March meeting of the Friends of Homeless Women that some of the 200 displaced homeless residents of Chinatown would relocate here.

A week later, Carol Greenwald, CEO of Gathering for Women, said the number of homeless women at the weekly luncheon was higher than usual. She didn't know if they were refugees of Chinatown.

I reviewed an "Important Notice" dated March 9, 2016, from the Coalition of Homeless Service Providers and Dorothy's Place (operated by the Franciscan Workers of Junipero Serra at 30 Soledad St. in Chinatown) that announced:

"...beginning March 23, the City of Salinas will begin clean-up activities in the Chinatown neighborhood, continuing for weeks until the entire neighborhood is finished. There may be pauses in activity, but they will continue until all encampments are gone. Once clean-up is done, you can't re-camp there."

The back side was a letter dated March 8, 2016, addressed to "Dearest Friends and Neighbors" from Jill Allen, excerpted here:

"These people are scared. And they're coming to Dorothy's Place for help. Over the last two months, with the help of Monterey County Dept. of Social Services, our basic services have doubled in use. . .

"There really are alternatives to encampment living. If we have a chance to provide the opportunities. But the County funding ends on March 30th."

Jill advised me last week that county funding has been extended through June 30.

Is Chinatown moving west? I spotted a blue igloo in a Monterey park last week.

The Monterey Peninsula Responds



Rudy Fischer, Pacific Grove councilmember now running for mayor against incumbent Bill Kampe, was first respondent. "No, I don't think we will have a Chinatown here on the Peninsula... It seems to me that situation (Chinatown) came about because of the space that was created there, as well as the (sort of) services that Salinas tried to provide."

He went to the Mission district in San Francisco about a month ago and "was shocked to see a small city of homeless people in tents and lean-tos under the freeway off ramps. . . We need to get going with some realistic efforts so that our area does not have places like that."

Next came two e-mails from Clyde Roberson, mayor of Monterey. I am saving his actual response for a separate column and excerpting aesthetic highlights from his re-election campaign announcement:

"Let's keep working together on seven key priorities, building on the wonderful progress currently being made and preserving our precious quality of life." They include: "Protecting neighborhoods, maintaining public safety, preserving our clean, scenic environment... and keeping our small-town feeling..."

I questioned Rick Marvin, Monterey's Housing/Property Manager, at the League of Women Voters' meeting last week. Rick said, "From what I understand, most homeless people—except for the travelers—prefer to stay where they are."

I had an Aha! Moment. *This is an election year! Let's conduct a NIMBY Poll!*

What's Your "Not-In-My-Back Yard" Vote?

If you favor Chinatown-style encampments near you, do nothing. If you prefer a win-win situation that helps Chinatown's homeless stay in Salinas, vote with your checkbook by contributing to Dorothy's Place.

For details, call 831-757-3838, visit www.dorothysplace.org/donate, or send contributions to Franciscan Workers of Junipero Serra, P.O. Box 2027, Salinas, CA 93902-2027.

(Next week: Where Monterey stands on homelessness/affordable housing.)

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