

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #91



Tommy Wright—Monterey Herald



James Whitcomb Riley—Wikipedia

BIG BLITZ BANDWAGONEERS

They're blowing the whistle on homelessness

By Wanda Sue Parrott

PROVING power of the press wasn't their point. If Bay Area media cooperated, could they start solving homelessness? They set Wed., June 29, 2016, for a concerted 24-hours media blitz. What happened? Wow!!

Extra, Extra, Read All About It!

KQED kicked off its campaign via public television; National Public Radio (NPR) targeted listeners. Cedar Street Times jumped on the Big Blitz Bandwagon by publicizing June 29 in this column.

The news spawned a movement originally intended to serve the San Francisco area. It that spread across America and is still growing.

Indiana poet James Whitcomb Riley (1849-1916) might have praised the media colloquially:

HOMELESSNESS

Fer far too long

you been hanging about,

but we're gonna gitcha,

so you best watch out!

Homelessness Is Not The New Normal

On June 29, 2016, this front-page letter ran like banner news in the *San Francisco Examiner*:

To the city and people of San Francisco:

Like you, we are frustrated, confused and dismayed by the seemingly intractable problem of homelessness in our city. Like you, we want answers — and change.

We see the misery around us — the 6,600 or more people who live on the streets of San Francisco — and we sense it is worsening. We feel for the people who live in doorways and under freeways, and for the countless others who teeter on the edge of eviction. We empathize with the EMTs, the nurses and doctors, the social workers and the police. They are on the front lines of this ongoing human catastrophe.

Numerous noble, well-intentioned efforts by both public and private entities have surfaced over the decades, yet the problem persists. It is a situation that would disgrace the government of any city. But in the technological and progressive capital of the nation, it is unconscionable.

So beginning today, more than 70 media organizations are taking the unprecedented step of working together to focus attention on this crucial issue.

We will pool our resources — reporting, data analysis, photojournalism, video, websites — and starting Wednesday, June 29, will publish, broadcast and share a series of stories across all of our outlets. We intend to explore possible solutions, their costs and viability.

Though this is a united effort, we do not claim to speak with one voice. There are many lenses through which the issue of homelessness can be viewed. However, we do not intend to let a desire for the perfect solution become the enemy of the good. We want to inspire and incite each other as much as we want to prod city and civic leaders.

Fundamentally, we are driven by the desire to stop calling what we see on our streets the new normal. Frustration and resignation are not a healthy psyche for a city.

Our aim is to provide you with the necessary information and potential options to put San Francisco on a better path. Then it will be up to all of us — citizens, activists, public and private agencies,

Signed: The Examiner Staff, The Homeless Project

The *San Francisco Chronicle* Bay Area News blurbs on June 29 included: “Homeless solution starts with supportive housing” and “How many people live on San Francisco’s streets?”

Kevin Fagan explored the question: *Could San Francisco increase its stock of supportive housing by enough units to get all of the neediest homeless people off its streets in just two years?*

Housing First Means Housing For All

Leadership Monterey joined the blitz early by creating its new YouTube video "Faces of Homelessness" that features Safe Place (for youth), Housing Resources Center, Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program (I-HELP), Gathering for Women and Veterans Transition Center. Tagline is "Homeless is not Hopeless." For details about how to view the video, contact Doris Beckman at goldenconnections1@gmail.com.

The *Monterey Herald* led the local blitz on June 29 with its “Stand Down for Homeless Veterans” post by Tommy Wright, who looks enough like James Whitcomb Riley to be his great grandson (twright@montereyherald.com):

(Seaside)--Homeless veterans will have the opportunity to receive free legal and medical services as well as clothing, hot meals and more at the Stand Down event taking place at Fort Ord on Aug. 19-21. . . The United Veterans Council of Monterey County and the Veterans Transition Center in Marina sponsor the biennial event. Visit www.vtcmonterey.org or call 831-883-VETS to volunteer or donate to the event.

Monterey County's top-priority homeless-issue motto is "Housing First." Reading all about it once won't eradicate this rising new normal, but unflinching media pressure can help halt its further growth.

So, blitzers and blasters, if you're game, let's do it!

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