

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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FAREWELL RECREATIONAL VEHICLES, WELCOME TENT CITY

By Wanda Sue Parrott

ERECTING the new signs at entrances to Seaside has been completed. If the notices in shiny black capital letters on white do their job, newcomers seeking overnight camp space will drive on by, taking trash, human excrement, dogs, kids, and homes-on-wheels out of town.

I discovered this admonition at Portola Dr. and Fremont Blvd. last week: **PARKING RECREATIONAL VEHICLES PROHIBITED.**

Did all the old curbside residents leave town? To find out, I made a sunset sweep of the area where I'd counted 26 four-wheel homes in May and half as many in June. I spotted only eight residential vehicles on July 21, 2016.

Apparently, the full sign is semi-effective: "Parking of Recreational Vehicles, Trailers and Prohibited Vehicles in the City of Seaside is prohibited on all public streets, parking lots and roadways. SMC 10.32.101."

So, where do Seaside's displaced campers go? I don't know. Are tent cities the answer? Maybe.

I do know that Seaside welcomes a 3-day tent city to be built next month for the 2016 Stand Down to help homeless veterans help themselves. In 2015, Seaside pledged \$35,000 to help Veterans Transition Center provide affordable housing for local homeless veterans. Service providers and volunteers are needed for the Stand Down. See contact details below.

Tent Cities On The Monterey Peninsula

Definition of "Tent City" according to the unabridged Random House Dictionary is: An area set up with tents, especially as to house homeless or displaced persons.

The temporary tent city to house as many as 500 homeless veterans of both genders will be set up in the motor vehicle pool section of old Fort Ord at the 2016 Stand Down from Aug. 19-21.

Tents that serve as temporary dormitories, like the one being set up in this photo from the 2012 Stand Down in Seaside, could provide shelter for a large percentage of the 500 homeless women now estimated to live on the Monterey Peninsula.

In fact, such longer-term tent cities are recommended for homeless women of the Monterey Peninsula by 2016 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury (MCCGJ) whose report was released on July 11.

A few synonyms for a tent city venue include: bivouac, campground, caravansary, encampment, hut, lean-to, lodge, log cabin, shack, shanty, tepee, wickiup, and wigwam.

Are Tent Cities Slums?

Tent cities like the one at the Stand Down consist of sturdy metal frames over which canvas is stretched to form crowd-containing mess halls, meeting and sleeping spaces.

Streets are formed of mobile and tent structures to house showers, toilets, cooking and dining facilities, along with dormitory-style sleeping quarters.

Tents also provide specialized services: healthcare; social, job and veteran's benefits counseling; clothing; free legal services.

Tents are as sanitary as those who occupy the impermanent premises make them.

Mobile vans provide everything from hot coffee to beauty salon, barber shop, and dentistry services, with bonuses like x-ray labs, libraries, and veterinarians for pets.

Yesteryear's Shanty Towns Upgraded

The 1930s equivalent of today's tent city was a shanty town nicknamed Hooverville after President Herbert Hoover, whom people blamed for the Depression.

Impoverished homeless millions survived in huts, tin shacks, cardboard boxes and tents in slum-like squalor. This photo from Clip Art shows well-dressed destitute shack-dwelling women in 1932. Today's tent cities offer sturdier, more sanitary, housing.

A contemporary tent city can be built in one to three days, then stored for future reuse.

Seaside/Marina/Fort Ord is likely location for Monterey Peninsula tent cities. Whether campers' vehicles will be welcome is unknown.

Waiting Areas For Housing Homeless Women

An excerpt from the 2016 MCCGJ Report's summary says:

"Tent Cities are America's...waiting areas for affordable and accessible housing. The idea of someone living in a tent... says little about the decisions made by those who dwell within and so much more about our nation's inability to adequately respond to those in need."

Persistent community concern regarding the ever-increasing number and needs of local homeless women led this Monterey County Civil Grand Jury (MCCGJ) to study these women, many of whom are over age 50.

Because single older homeless women are among the very vulnerable, the MCCGJ believed it was important to investigate their situations, including causes of homelessness, obstacles, and housing resources available to them.

"We found that loss of income (from partners or jobs) brought about evictions, resulting in women living in cars while they seek low-cost housing; but this housing is so rarely available that women end up in tents, in shelters or on the street."

To learn more about the Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Report, visit:

<http://www.monterey.courts.ca.gov/grandjury/Reports.aspx>.

Be patient, as this document is long and uploads slowly. For details about the Veterans Transition Center's 2016 Monterey Stand Down, visit www.vtcmonterey.org and/or e-mail info@vtcmonterey.org.

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Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com or leave a message with
The Yodel Poet at 831-899-5887.