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# HOMeward

## Street Journal



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Homeless Resources

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### SHOC Pressures Sacramento to Set Up Tent City



by Paula Lomazzi

A group of homeless people in Sacramento has been planning for several months to establish a tent city in the California state capital. The Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee (SHOC) has held weekly meetings and worked tirelessly to offer homeless people in Sacramento an alternative to sleeping alone on the streets, in alleyways, in doorways or in jails.

Studying the guidelines of successful tent cities in Seattle, WA, and Portland, OR, SHOC decided to adopt strict rules prohibiting alcohol, drugs or violence in the intentional com-

munity. Environmental principles were researched and incorporated into SHOC's plans to set up a tent city. Community support and participation were encouraged and generously given by many concerned members of the housed community in Sacramento and Davis.

SHOC's first attempt at establishing a pilot encampment entailed meetings with representatives of the Golden Empire Council of the Boy Scouts of America and a Camp Pollock Ranger to ask if they were willing to host the tent city for the winter months at Camp Pollock. It was the most obvious location for a first try,

in that Camp Pollock is already zoned for camping; and being a Boy Scout camp, it has restrooms with showers and is located centrally, near the services many homeless people rely upon. This request was denied, although both park and council representatives were gracious and supportive and spent much time offering valuable advice.

Undaunted, SHOC's next step was to apply for a permit with the City of Sacramento to camp on public property. Muir Park was the first target location, a gated park with a combination lock most assuredly aimed at keeping out the homeless population. SHOC

was told that Muir Park was to be closed for the winter and its application was automatically denied.

Even so, officials responsible for the review met with SHOC member Cliff Crooks to discuss other possible options. Officials suggested that Sutter's Landing, a new park next to the old dump, would be a better location for a tent city; yet they did not anticipate easy approval by the City. Even so, another permit application was submitted for the Sutter's Landing location; that permit was also denied.

Before SHOC set up a single tent, its inquiries attracted the media spotlight. The Sacramento Bee published "Sacramento denies tent city to homeless" on January 6. On January 16, 2003, the weekly Sacramento News & Review ran an editorial entitled, "It takes a different village," which urged the City to accept the tent village concept in

see **Tent City** page 4

### A Brief History of Tent City Movements

By Desiree Hellegers and Laurie Mercier

*I am out of your doorway,  
Dignity Village is like my island out in  
No-man's land. We can do what we want.  
My tent is my home, so leave me the hell alone.*

Michael Broderick (1946-2001), Dignity Village, Oregon

At the turn of the millenium, the phrase "tent city movements" has increasingly come to refer to intentional communities organized by the unhoused. These communities serve as an alternative to sleeping on the streets or in regimented shelters, and as a form of political protest against the material conditions and social policies that create and perpetuate homelessness.

Historical Background

The numbers of unhoused or precariously

housed Americans grew in the 19th and 20th centuries along with industrial capitalism, urbanization, and fluctuating labor markets. Skid Rows became centers for the urban indigent, featuring cheap hotels and restaurants, SROs (single room occupancies), missions, and hiring halls. Men, women, and children without shelter huddled near heated grates on city streets, depended on passing boxcars for transportation and bedding, or joined fellow homeless in ramshackle shantytowns erected near cities' edges. Local governments alternated between tolerating transients during periods of labor demand and enforcing vagrancy and other laws to rid their communities of the unhoused.

Workers evicted from company or landowner housing for strike and organizing activity often created tent cities for emergency shelter and to maintain community solidarity in their collective protests. Evicted from their homes during the Colorado Fuel and Iron strike of 1913-1914, coal miners and their families created the Ludlow tent colony. On April 20,

1914, National Guard troops fired into tents and burned the colony to the ground, killing two women and eleven children. The incident prompted demonstrations across the country against Rockefeller's Standard Oil corporation.

During the Depression, the numbers of homeless, hoboes and encampments ballooned. While the self-governing "Hoovervilles" of the 1930s were rarely the sight of radical organizing on behalf of the poor, their name and visibility served as signifiers of the indifference of the president and of the federal government's failure to address the problems of joblessness and poverty.

The "Bonus Army" of 1932 created the most famous tent city of the period erected for explicitly political goals, as 25,000 unemployed men encamped at the edge of the nation's capitol, demanding early payment of their service bonus. The Hoover administra-

see **History** page 3

## STREET NEWS DIGEST: JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 2003

by Molly Rhodes

**Plans for a tent city in Sacramento** have been stymied by the city's refusal to grant a permit for any kind of overnight camp on public property. Homeless advocates have not given up, however, especially when the alternative to a camp, living on the streets, has led to the deaths of at least three homeless people in the city last year, not to mention a handful of other suspected homicides that have not been confirmed by the Sacramento County Coroner's office, according to the Sacramento Bee. A letter from the city's Parks and Recreation Department denying the permit stated that allowing camping would interfere with parks meant for "occasional recreational visits" from all residents. Yet in cities like Portland, OR, officials have learned to make exceptions for a camp that provides the best option currently available to a lot of homeless people. "It's a practical alternative for many (who) would be sleeping in doorways and under bridges." Portland city staffer Marshall Runkle, who works with the Portland camp, told the Bee. "At the end of the day, it's a group of homeless people taking responsibility for their own lives and trying to help improve the lives of others."

Apparently, "finding joy and profit through demeaning other human beings," specifically homeless human beings, is not a felony, at least not in the eyes of a Southern California judge who dismissed felony charges of battery and soliciting against four men who made the Bumfights video. The men had been accused of soliciting homeless men to fight each other, then videotaping and selling the results, according to the San Diego Union-Tribune. More than 300,000 people are believed to have purchased the \$20 tape over the Internet. The four men still face charges of conspiracy to stage an illegal fight, and three face conspiracy to commit battery. Three of the men involved in the fighting have also filed civil suits against the filmmakers. A note on the video's website, www.bumfights.com, reads: "Despite all this nonsense, we at Bumfights would like you to know that the video is still for sale, and as long as there is a 1st Amendment in this country it's gonna take a helluva lot more than that to shut us down." They are currently working on a sequel.

Sometimes, it takes a major fire for officials to see the homeless problem right before their eyes. Such was the case in Morristown, NJ, when a fire started by a homeless man's candle reignited debates about what to do with homeless people who don't find their way into shelters and instead stay on the streets. Mayor John Delaney, Jr., points out that the city has plenty of shelters, and suspects that rules about sobriety and curfews are keeping people away, according to the Daily Record News. Yet simply blaming homeless people who don't want to follow the rules and sweeping them out of vacant buildings and lots will do nothing to solve the problem, pointed out Professor David

C. Listokin at the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University. "We don't know exactly who they are and why they go where they go," Listokin told the Daily Record. "If people had such a good sense of it, there may not be a homeless problem."

**After more than a decade without a direct venue to listen to the problems of homelessness in Minneapolis and St. Paul** from the people who experience it, city and county officials got to hear the stories and needs of hundreds of local homeless people. The forum was organized by County Commissioner Gail Dorfman as a way for officials to try to find new solutions to homelessness, according to the St. Paul Pioneer Press. Yet finally hearing all the various problems did not mean officials were in any better position to make people's lives any better. As one participant put it toward the end of the long day, "Are we wasting our time? Are we wasting your time?"

**Homelessness in Atlantic City, NJ,** has reached such a level that it's even warranting coverage in places like Gambling Magazine, which describes a growth of single women and female senior citizens in the city's homeless population. The notable shift in the homeless population has been attributed to a number of factors, including gambling addictions, domestic abuse, and the increased cost of maintaining a home. While single women make up about 13 percent of the nationally recorded homeless population, in Atlantic City they made up 20 percent last year, or 600 out of 3,000 people who sought shelter at the Atlantic City Rescue Mission. Just over 60 of those women were ages 62 or older.

**Key West, FL, has become the latest** in a growing list of cities that have instituted anti-homeless laws in the name of promoting tourism. Last month, city commissioners created a "no-panhandling" zone in the downtown core, so now anyone caught sleeping outside or asking for money in that area gets up to a \$500 fine and 60 days in jail, according to the Austin American Statesman. While homeless advocates in Key West and across the country argue that such laws are in violation of free speech and assembly rights, city officials, with a healthy push from downtown business organizations, counter that without the laws tourists don't want to visit their streets. Other cities that have recently passed similar laws include Santa Monica, CA; Providence, RI; Fresno, CA; Huntington, WV; Eugene, OR; and Las Cruces, NM. Key West is also the home of one of the most progressive anti-discrimination laws, including the protection of transgender people, which promoted the "One Human Family" city slogan for which it is known. Explained city commissioner Tom Oosterhout, who sponsored the anti-homeless law, "One Human Family" does not include criminals or people who don't want to earn their way in society."

It also doesn't include people who get free lunches, at least according to businesses in downtown Omaha, NE, which

are angling to get a local lunch program moved from a popular outdoor mall to a less visible location. Proponents of the plan point out that the indoor location would be warmer and provide access to restrooms, while homeless advocates caution that the needs of homeless people should be taken into account before the program is moved simply to get it out of sight of visitors. "It's important to remember that we will have homeless people in our community, whether or not we can see them," Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede of Dietz Methodist told the Omaha World-Herald. "I think Omaha looks our best when we are visibly living with and caring for our homeless people."

**In the course of tackling the homeless** problem in Birmingham, AL, advocates tried to record exactly who that population is made of and what services they most need. Last month, 30 volunteers for the Metropolitan Services for the Homeless hit the city streets, armed with cigarettes, scarves, gloves, blankets, socks, muffins, pens, and paper in the hopes of ending wary homeless people to talk to them and complete a survey, according to The Birmingham News. The volunteers visited streets, parks, bus shelters, and abandoned houses, anywhere homeless people not in emergency shelter might stay for the night. Last year, MBSH recorded 1,900 homeless people, a figure they guessed was only about half of the total population.

**Requests for both emergency food** assistance and emergency shelter increased by 19 percent over the past year — the steepest rise in a decade — according to an annual survey released in December by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Of the 25 participating cities, 18 saw a rise in homelessness and hunger, which were attributed to housing prices, low-paying jobs, unemployment, and the weak economy. Half of the cities saw a decrease in resources to meet emergency food demands, and two-thirds had to decrease the amount of food given to each family in need in order to cover everyone's demand. Among the homeless populations surveyed by the cities, 39 percent were single men, 39 percent were families with children, 32 percent had substance abuse problems, 23 percent had mental illnesses, and 22 percent had jobs. "These are not simply statistics," said Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell, who chairs the Conference's Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. "These are real people who are hungry and homeless in our cities." Both Portland, OR, and Seattle were included in the survey.

**Being homeless in Los Angeles's** downtown core would essentially become a criminal act if a coalition of 300 downtown businesses gets their way. The Central City Association wants to make camping illegal, establish a "fast track" downtown police court, and prevent church groups from providing people with food, according to the World Socialist Web Site. Spearheading the operation is L.A. police chief William J. Bratton, who

gained his anti-homeless reputation as New York commissioner of police when he forcefully cleared off New York's streets. Even before the city council has beginning debating any proposals existing laws, Bratton started "Operation Enough," pre-dawn raids on downtown encampments and low-cost hotels with more than 200 officers arresting almost 215 people mainly for parole violations and associating with known felons. Once the homeless population has been cleared off the streets, the abandoned industrial buildings and warehouses that they stay in for shelter can be converted to luxury apartments and lofts.

**Rather than kick homeless people out** of future market-rate homes, New York City's solution has been to move homeless families into them, according to the New York Times. An emergency housing program — begun two years ago when shelters were full and the city had no where else to put homeless families — now houses 2,000 at the average rate of \$2,900 a month per family, and has cost the cash-strapped city \$33 million since July alone. In addition, because the program is considered temporary, landlords and buildings get little scrutiny. Known slumlords are taking in cushy city checks while much of their housing is considered dangerous, with extensive records of violations for unsafe living conditions. While the city wants to end the program as too costly and not helpful for getting a family into a long-term home, there are too many unsheltered homeless people and too few alternatives.

**Just as one of the alternatives New** York is considering involves retired cruise ships, now a former San Francisco supervisor is keenly interested in the retired Navy ships sitting idle off their shores. The Rev. Amos Brown has his eye on the U.S.S. Proteus, a former submarine tender that comes complete with laundry facilities, fitness center, store, barber-shop, and 1,200 rooms that could hold hundreds, maybe thousands, of homeless people, according to the San Francisco Examiner. Yet even if the cost of refurbishing the ship — \$4 million — and mooring it — \$4,000-\$5,000 a day — were not so prohibitive, homeless advocates note that any water location would be too far from other services like mental health care and job training to be any help in getting homeless people off the boat and into permanent housing.

**No matter what Florida's Pinellas** County sheriff Everett Rice thinks is the best solution to deal with homeless people, he might at least think twice before calling them "bums" again. In response to his newspaper remark, 80 homeless people and homeless advocates marched in protest outside Rice's office, according to the Herald Tribune. Rice's spokesperson said the sheriff was only referring to homeless people who commit crimes and "terrorize" the neighborhood, but the protest organizer, Steve Kersker, hopes Rice now sees he has to do more to get homeless people off the streets than call them names.

# History continued from page 1

tion sent the army to disband and destroy the protest. Troops burned the Bonus Army homes and the transients' hopes that the federal government would assist them.

In the 1930s, when southern sharecroppers and tenant farmers, like supporters of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, were thrown off the land for organizing, they sought solidarity in makeshift tent camps. Even as late as 1960 in Fayette County, Tennessee, white property owners evicted more than 400 African American tenant families for participating in the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League, which had initiated a voter-registration drive. With support of an African American property owner, the families formed a community known as "Tent City." A smaller tent city arose in nearby Haywood County, where dozens of families had also been evicted for their political work. The Justice Department filed suit against landowners and merchants in Fayette County who had violated the civil rights of the tenants, and in July 1962 they were enjoined from interfering with the rights of citizens to vote.

## Modern tent city movements

Building on historical efforts by the unhoused to assert autonomy through independent communities, the modern tent city movement has taken a stand to highlight the lack of affordable housing and to reclaim public spaces that have increasingly excluded the poor. Since the 1980s tent cities have materialized in cities as diverse as Las Vegas, San Diego, San Jose, and Corpus Christi, building on elements of the civil rights, women's, gay liberation, environmental, and poor people's movements.

The pioneers of the contemporary tent city movements are vocal critics of the lack of and limitations of existing shelters, and more broadly of charity-based approaches to poverty. Residents of tent cities argue that their itinerant housing provides a preferable alternative to overcrowded and unsanitary shelters and more effective security for safeguarding their few remaining material possessions. Tents and lean-tos, however ramshackle, tend to provide greater privacy than is afforded in most shelters. Tent communities embrace both gay and straight couples, and in some cases, children. Shelters almost universally enforce gender segregation while excluding same sex couples. Nationally only a handful of shelters allow pets but they are a visible feature of tent city landscapes. While the majority of shelters are open to residents only at night, tent cities accommodate the variable hours of the working poor.

At the same time, residents emphasize that the collective nature of tent city living protects them from assault. They note that while crimes perpetrated by "transients" receive amplified media attention, crimes against the homeless go largely unreported in local and national media and are frequently acknowledged only in the pages of the country's approximately thirty newspapers published by and for the homeless. Notably, within days of the forced closure of the Las Vegas tent city in July 2001, a former resident of the

encampment was severely beaten and robbed by three assailants, and another homeless man was beaten to death.

Homeless activists erected tent cities with pointed political goals to move individuals out of the relative isolation of urban doorways to become a more visible presence to city officials and residents. Many of these efforts have yielded important symbolic victories, including city promises to expand shelter beds and housing units. In 1993 the city of Eugene sanctioned a three-year experiment to allow homeless to camp on a parking lot near the University of Oregon's Autzen Stadium. When funding ran out, the Centennial Car Camp closed, but the city was forced to continue to allow some scattered legal camping on unused public parking lots.

More often, the tent city movement has met resistance from neighbors, police, and elected officials. In 1991 officials disassembled a Santa Ana, California, camp after allowing it to exist for a year, and in 1992, Marin County, California, officials closed a camp that appeared in the wake of the closure of a National Guard Armory shelter. As the homeless are driven from one site and forced to lay claim to another, frustrated city officials enact new rules or conduct sweeps. When over a hundred homeless who lived in Tompkins Square Park on Manhattan's Lower East Side protested the city's efforts to remove them, the city closed and fenced off the park for "renovations." The police in Washington, D.C., tore down temporary shacks erected each day in Lafayette Park. San Francisco alternated its methods of removing the homeless just as quickly as homeless found new places to camp.

It is not simply the transitory nature of the accommodations that garners resistance from local communities and authorities. In fact, officially sanctioned tent cities have long been embraced as an answer to housing and prison shortages, to attract low wage laborers, and to house state troops called to quell civil dissent. In Alaskan fishing towns like St. Petersburg, city sanctioned tent cities have long served to accommodate seasonal workers. In California, in the absence of both affordable conventional housing and sustainable wages, 1,100 state sanctioned and licensed tent cities serve a fraction of the state's estimated 700,000 migrant farmworkers on a seasonal basis.

## West Coast Efforts

Although cities grew determined to eliminate encampments of more than a few people, a number of coalitions persisted on the West Coast to sustain the new tent city movement. Three tent cities have been the most visible and have served as models for other embryonic efforts.

In 1985 homeless activist Ted Hayes and 73 homeless men, women, and children established a shantytown in Central City East, or Skid Row, in Los Angeles. From its inception, "Justicville" had strained relations with city authorities and social service providers. Despite efforts by advocates and a 35-day fast by Hayes, the city closed Justicville/Homeless,

USA on May 10. For the next eight years LA's homeless lobbied government and businesses and engaged in civil disobedience to demand attention to the plight of the homeless. In November 1993 the Dome Village opened as an innovative effort to provide a structural alternative for those unable or unwilling to live in traditional shelters. The 20 Omni-Sphere domes provided community and living spaces for many shunned by traditional service providers. The Village spawned a number of micro-enterprises, created a CyberDome computer learning center, and cultivated an organic garden.

During the Goodwill Games held in Seattle in the summer of 1990, a group of homeless men and women decided to camp out on the waterfront in clear view of tourists and the city's major daily newspaper. To underscore the need for affordable housing, on Thanksgiving activists created a tent city beside the Kingdome, which prompted city officials to provide more indoor shelter space. Campers organized as the Seattle Housing and Resource Effort (SHARE) and formed alliances with churches and other community groups to address the need for low-income housing.

As in other cities, Seattle's homeless made some headway while seeing other gains eroded. Activists periodically camped out in front of municipal buildings to demand lodging lost by redevelopment efforts in the 1990s. As a new mayor in 1998 held a housing summit to address the needs of the homeless, his police force began regular bulldozing of campsites above I-5. Even as police closed the site, Mayor Paul Schell promised new funds to eliminate homelessness.

SHARE set up two more tent communities in 1999 to provide shelter during the WTO protests; this time activists, banding together with advocates from local faith communities, strategically located their encampment on church properties to avoid city closures. In September 2001 a King County superior court judge ruled that because the military, Scouts, and disaster-relief groups had histories of establishing safe encampments, the city could not discriminate against the homeless group's permit efforts. A new federal law that appeared to allow churches to ignore land-use codes while engaged in religious practices also strengthened Tent City's cause. In March 2002 Seattle and Tent City representatives signed an agreement that allows the community to remain in one commercial or residential spot for up to three months.

Portland's latest tent city movement was initially catalyzed by a Multnomah County Circuit Court decision in September 2000. Striking down the city's ban on outdoor camping, which dated back to 1981, Judge Stephen L. Gallagher ruled that the ordinance constituted "cruel and unusual punishment," and effectively punished "the status of being homeless" and impeded homeless people's right to travel. With the city intent on appealing the decision, on December 16, 2000, a core group of eight homeless individuals pitched their tents on public land under the Morrison bridge in downtown

Portland. Despite Gallagher's decision, the threat of arrest impelled five early moves even as the "camps" population steadily grew, until a formal agreement was struck with the city authorizing the camp's temporary location under a freeway.

The relative stability of new, albeit temporary, legitimacy enabled the birth of Dignity Village. Forced in September 2001 to relocate to a fenced enclosure abutting the city's leaf composting yard outside the city center, with the help of City Repair, AmeriCorp volunteers, and other community supporters, the Village erected a communal hall and domed conference room out of salvaged materials. In the spring, Villagers banded together with Portland's Environmental Middle School, greenscaping the blacktop with communal vegetable beds. The Village has variously participated in arts and theater projects; has educated a barrage of local and international reporters, academics, students and others interested in its experiment in community, has fashioned a partnership with a Japanese tent city, and has initiated an organic farming cooperative and several micro-businesses.

Homeless advocates debate whether tent cities can ultimately affect larger social change needed to address the lack of affordable housing in the United States. Others worry that the attention and resources devoted to the camps will detract from other efforts to develop adequate and humane emergency and long-term low-income housing. The latter argument, which tends to focus almost exclusively on the quality of housing, generally fails to adequately acknowledge the challenge that tent cities, with their emphasis on self-determination, pose to the country's core political assumptions. It must be noted, however, that many homeless themselves prefer shelter beds or more independent living on the streets to tent city accommodations. But tent city activists believe that they are creating community and "homes," while challenging city, state and federal policies and the economic systems that foster poverty, erode affordable housing stocks and criminalize the unhoused.

*Desiree Hellegers and Laurie Mercier are on the faculty of the Center for Social and Environmental Justice at Washington State University Vancouver. They are currently working on a book about Portland social movements. This is an edited article, for the complete story visit [www.dignityvillage.org](http://www.dignityvillage.org).*

## Sac Landlord Lobby



# Tent City

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Sacramento, saying that many different approaches should be used to help address the homeless crisis.

SHOC persisted in trying different approaches and worked at gaining more community support, which increased daily. Two recent murders of homeless people made the group decide not to delay any longer. The need for a safe encampment was dire and could not wait until all the plans were perfected. The victims of the recent murders could have found safety if there had been a tent city for them to go to.

On February 17, 2003, TV news crews arrived at Loaves & Fishes in Sacramento to cover the start of the March for the Right to Sleep, the march leading toward the next attempt at establishing a tent city. People carrying protest signs, some pushing shopping carts, some packing their camping gear on their backs, and others joining to show their solidarity, headed for

Sutter's Landing. The Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee carried their banner. Representatives from Women's Economic Agenda Project (WEAP) came up from Oakland for the day to lend support and carried their banner.

The long march ended at the park at 'C' and 28th Streets, a few blocks from Sutter's Landing, where many were waiting to participate in a pre-civil disobedience rally. Food Not Bombs was faithfully there to served dinner to the many guests and campers. Sacramento Mayor Heather Fargo sent two vans with a message to the campers that 50 beds were available at the overflow shelter and that they could get a ride there. Bus tickets were offered to anyone wishing to go home; but no one accepted, everyone already being home.

When the tent city's future residents made ready to set up camp, Sacramento police informed the group that anyone who stayed at Sutter's Landing after dusk would either get a ticket or go to jail.

Though SHOC had planned to move in unison to another undisclosed location, the uneasy situation led to the final dispersal of the crowd, most going their separate ways. TV news crews covered the rally, and reported on the incident with the police, the van with seats empty because no one accepted the ride, and a promise that, "We will return!"

The next evening many did return, not expecting to be allowed to stay, but intent on keeping their promise. TV news across the channels reported on the action. The Sacramento Bee ran a good article about the tent city action on February 18. Access Sacramento

extensively covered the event, and as events unfold more coverage can be expected.

Currently, SHOC is regrouping and recruiting, sleeping outside as usual, since its members are unable to find affordable housing. The movement toward establishing a tent city in Sacramento and in cities across the nation goes forward, a movement that will continue and grow until each city had effectively addressed the affordable housing crisis and until homelessness has been decriminalized.



## An Observation On Changing Attitudes Cops: Old School vs. New School

by Timot

Most of us have some good childhood memories of policemen who worked the beats around our neighborhoods and towns. It was not uncommon for these officers to be familiar faces year in and year out, with a meaningful connection to those of us who grew up and lived in our communities. Whether it was playing Santa and throwing candy to us from a Christmas float, or giving us our first official tongue lashing for driving too fast when we were sixteen, these officers had an opportunity to impact our lives in a positive way and often did.

My first experience with the "dark side of the force" happened in 1987 when I was a senior in high school. After a school related event in the evening, three friends and I were driving in a residential neighborhood to drop everyone off. We were pulled over for driving ten miles over the speed limit. Because it was late, we looked tired and our eyes were probably red. Despite the driver's attempts to explain that our group did not drink or do drugs, we were forced to exit the car and sit on the curb. The encounter ended with me getting

popped on the top of the head several times with a heavy duty police flashlight and my friend getting an escalated ticket. I made the mistake of accidentally interrupting the officer while he was speaking.

While this experience is nothing compared to what some people have been through, it was my first personal eye opener to bad judgement by a cop. It was not the last.

Now as a homeless man in his early thirties, I have become seasoned in the ways of law enforcement, both good and bad. Between my own stories and the stories older tramps have told me, we need to be aware of the changes that have been made in law enforcement here in Sacramento.

Although the police have always had a formidable presence here in the Capitol for obvious reasons, there is evidence that over the years local law enforcement has adopted the neo-macho bullying tactics that have wreaked such havoc in cities such as Los Angeles, San Diego and Oakland. There is a clear difference in the attitude toward the homeless between the cops that have lines in their faces and the cops that do not.

The "Old School" officers tend to have a more humane attitude towards street people, while at the same time not taking any of our bullshit. They recognize that while we may not be fiscal heroes, we are still Americans and part of the community. They have a long history of enforcing the law without divorcing us from humanity. Unfortunately, with more and more of the Old School cops retiring, and more New School cops aspiring, things have taken a turn for the worst.

With highly specialized training and technology, the "Robo-Cop" generation of police officers is hitting the streets and the skies of Sacramento without even a nod of appreciation to the wisdom of the Old School officers. They seem to be overeducated, underseasoned and disconnected from the public they swear to protect and to serve. And while modern society is being faced with a myriad of new and serious problems, there are still political solutions to these problems that do not require the micro-management and arrest of the less fortunate.

The Old School cops know that they are not the politicians that have been

elected to deal with society's problems. In the political struggle to change laws and demand decency for the homeless community, they can actually be a great asset. Many of them express regret in having to give citations or make arrests because a New School cop or security guard gave them a call. This is particularly true when it comes to enforcement of the anti-camping ordinance, better known as the "California Sleeping Ban".

Though the ordinance has been on the books for years, the New School cops have gone overboard in their enforcement of it. It is the equivalent of the law against jaywalking, which has also been on the books for years. What if every person who jaywalked in Sacramento was cited or arrested? The cost would not be worth the hassle and we would not be any closer to a real Utopia than we are now. The Old School cops realize this when it comes to Sacramento's homeless, and I believe that they will not let their years of experience, common-sense and service fade away as we come closer to ending the sleeping ban in California and building a Tent City in Sacramento.

# Welcome to HOMEWARD:

Please help us make a difference!



Homeward Street Journal has been publishing since 1997 as a non-profit project of the Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee, which is a part of the Sacramento Housing Alliance. The paper's mission is to alleviate miscommunication between communities by educating the public about housing and poverty issues, and by giving the homeless a voice in the public forum. Homeward also informs the homeless of shelter and occupational assistance, and acts as a creative self-help opportunity for those individuals who wish to participate. The opinions expressed in Homeward are those of the authors, and not necessarily the Sacramento Housing Alliance or SHOC or Homeward.

**Submissions and Editorial Policy**  
We welcome any participation or contributions. Articles, poems and other writing can be submitted at our office in the Loaves & Fishes complex, or mailed to the address below.  
All writing submitted for publication will be edited as necessary, with due respect for the authors' intent. The editors will attempt to consult with an author if changes are necessary, however, the paper will go to print with the story as edited if the author is unavailable.  
All letters to the Editor must be signed to be published. If the writer wishes to remain anonymous a/n should so state, but the letter must still be signed.  
Poetry and graphics will not be edited, either the paper will publish the submission or not.  
In submitting articles to the paper, authors give their permission to print their submissions in accordance with the above stipulations, as well as publishing excerpts on Homeward's webpage and possible reprinting in NASNA member papers, with due byline. Any requests for stories outside the above three will be referred to the author.

Subscriptions are available with a \$15 contribution. Make checks out to SHOC.

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**Joining SHA**  
The Sacramento Housing Alliance is a network of concerned citizens which promotes decent affordable housing for low income households and homeless people through advocacy and participation in public discourse.

## On Camping & Dieing

By Art Clay

On March 13th many homeless people heard a rumor that the owner of a piece of property on Bannon St., near the mission, had given permission to camp on his land if they cleaned up all of the trash. I investigated it and unable to contact the owner at that time. Everyone at the site said it was true, they heard it themselves.

It rained that afternoon, and even though the homeless people were unequipped for the rain they worked with joy at the expectation of a safe place to camp without harassment from this City. They were wet but seemed not to notice it. After the property was cleaned up in what seemed to be record time, they started setting up their camps.

Meanwhile, I was back in my office trying to find the owner to get confirmation, but was constantly interrupted by people wanting to know more about the camp. I explained to them that it wasn't confirmed yet, but we were working on it. Everything seemed to good to be true, and it was. As evening approached I got a call from one of the campers, she said the cops were there and they were arresting everyone. It wasn't that bad - they only arrested the ones with warrants and gave camping tickets to the rest.

What really happened was the caretaker, who was responsible to keep that piece of property cleaned, told the people they could stay and camp there if they cleaned it up. He had no authority to give permission and when the city found out, the cops were sent in to run them off.

In 2002 there were 33 deaths of homeless people of which four were murdered plus one was an attempted murder. In January, 2003 we have had two more murders. Life on the streets is getting more dangerous every day now, but the City of Sacramento is still stopping the homeless people from doing anything to protect themselves. We have applied for camping permits to bring the people together in a safe environment only to have our efforts denied.

Sacramento has a winter overflow shelter system that they say protects the homeless through the winter months. This isn't even a half-truth. Throughout this country cities have winter shelters (and some have year round shelters) where a person can stay for the entire winter, after all that is what winter shelters are all about. In Sacramento, a person can only stay for two weeks unless they sign up for a program, this will give an extension. The problem here is not everyone can fit into county programs for various reasons, which means some only get two weeks and then back out in the cold. Also, if a person has an animal they can't go in, people in a wheelchair can't get in at all for there is no access for wheelchairs. Many couples won't go in because the shelter system separates them. Others say they won't put up with the indignity they are forced to endure. These are only a few of the reasons the homeless people won't go into Sacramento's overflow shelter and the proof of this is the overflow this year has had up to 50 beds open, except for in the nastiest weather.

The solution to all of these problems is first change the shelter system making it compatible to the human life style, and legalize camping. Camping has proven to work in other cities such as Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon and Share/Wheel Tent City 3 in Seattle, Washington. Alaska has tent cities in three different cities, Valdez, Kodiak, and Petersburg that were established for the cannery workers and they provide restrooms with showers, cooking facilities and telephones.

Sacramento says there will be no camping, absolutely not, it's for the public's safety. Nonsense, the homeless aren't a threat, they are the ones being attacked. Not only by city policy, but by the citizens who throw rotten vegetables and rocks at them. They beat them up and murder them in their sleep. How can Sacramento justify a policy that punishes its citizens for being homeless?

## Homelessness and the Importance of Coffee

by Timot

Whether you sleep by the river, in an alley, on church steps or in a shelter, there is nothing as important as a good (or bad) cup of coffee in the morning. Coffee and the homeless go back together as far as the sun and the moon. Though not all "free-dwelling" people throughout history have been called "homeless", we are descendants in the spirit of European nomads, African tribesmen and American pioneers on the plain. All of these peoples had their morning rituals and ours is drinking java.

Just the thought that a nice, hot cup of coffee will be there for us in the morning is enough to send us soundly to sleep in the evening. Think of those times when camping far from any convenience store, that you wake up to find that your jar of Folger's Instant has been completely depleted. Chaos! Not even doubling-up on tea bags fills the void. So most of us always do a double-check on our coffee supply when we get our food stamps or checks.

I don't know where coffee comes from and I don't care. It's good. Though most of us would give another homeless person the shirt off our back or our last quarter, I doubt there are many of us who would give our only cup of coffee away.

There are many ways to experiment with coffee as well. I've gone through periods of just drinking it black, but for the past few years I've been a cream and sugar man. There are flavored coffees such as hazelnut and mocha mint, and fancy coffees such as lattes, cappuccino, espresso and frappacino. I've never had a frappacino, but I think it would be a great name for an Italian opera star. He could get really cranked on free frappacinos before his shows!

The worst coffee I've ever had was when I reused old coffee grounds from the morning before. Even if you change the filter and pour it through twice, it always comes

out weak and stale. Better to put your clothes on and walk down to the store for more coffee, than waste all your sugar trying to change the taste.

As far as homeless services go in Sacramento, I would have to rank Loaves and Fishes as having the best coffee. It's magical. The Salvation Army ranks a close second and it's available on weekends if you volunteer in the kitchen. VOA is third, but there's been reports that it's not available every morning. Sacrilege! There are a few other little homeless spots that have decent coffee, but those I will keep secret for fear of being mobbed by other homeless people who share the secret and the bounty (well, OK! One of them is named after the first book of the Bible, but that's all I'll say. If you don't know the first book of the Bible, then it's time for you to read the Bible!).

The social benefits of drinking coffee together are not to be denied either. When it comes to politics, current events or sports, coffee takes the conversation to a whole different level. And leaving to get a refill is a wonderful way to escape a lousy conversation. All your bases are covered.

In order to satisfy their urges for coffee, it seems most people drink the first cup quickly and the second cup slower. Afternoon and evening coffee have their own unique rhythms though. Having a cup of decaf after dinner is a whole different experience, enjoyed more for the taste than the effect.

To wrap up, I believe the homeless community with its coffee ways has much to teach world leaders. If they would discover the dimension of coffee communing that we have, the world would be a much better place. Bottoms up!

(next issue: Homelessness and the Importance of Cigarettes)

**The SHA does not itself provide or manage housing.**  
You may call for info: (916) 442-1198  
Annual Membership dues: Standard, \$35; Low-income, \$15

**Organizations:**  
Full, 0.1% agency budget; Associate, \$100  
Send donations to:  
Sacramento Housing Alliance  
PO Box 2430  
Sacramento, CA 95812

# Gini's Dream

by Lillian Hansen

This is a "blessing through the gift of a miracle created by two very gifted artists who shared their lives with us, while making a home here, and not being homeless anymore. The residence program cannot thank them enough for their talent and love, which they now give to everyone who comes through these doors." These were the words written by Gini that was on a poster right next to the mural presented at the Volunteers of America shelter on Friday, March 7. For several years, Gini had dreamed of having a mural painted at the shelter depicting a shipwreck and lighthouse.

The occasion of the unveiling of the mural was during the celebration of the 107th anniversary of the Volunteers of America given at the Bannon Street shelter. Leo McFarland, president of the VOA Greater Sacramento & Northern Nevada spoke, giving a brief history of the

Volunteers of America and then thanking the two artists for the very special mural. Virginia "Gini" Nordberg, program director of the Aid-in-Kind shelter at Bannon Street, hosted the celebration. There was a lovely buffet for all.

The two artists, Lee Parks and Ray Hillestad, were both residents of the VOA program when they painted the mural, and were only too happy to contribute their artistic talent in gratitude for the help that they received. It took six weeks to complete, during December 2002 through March 2003, working about six hours a day each.

The mural itself changed as it was being painted more than once and photographs of the different stages were on display on



Photos: above: Lee, Ray, Gini, and Leo  
left: the Mural (photo courtesy Jose Rocha)



the poster. The mural depicts a shipwreck at sea during a stormy black night. The shipwrecked people are being rescued by those ashore. There is a large tall lighthouse giving its light for all to see. Gini is one of the rescuers, as well other shelter staff, who volunteered to be models for Ray's portraiture. It is impressive and gives the viewer a dramatic heart-rending portrayal of what it must be like for those whose lives have been shipwrecked and are in need of a safe haven.

The Volunteers of America began as an evangelical movement in New York City by Ballington and Maude Boothe. Ballington Boothe was the son of William Boothe, who founded the Salvation Army in England. Maude Boothe was responsible for leading a movement that eliminated the ball & chain and stripped uniforms used in prisons during the early part of the 1900's. In 1911, the Volunteers of America became established in Sacramento, CA. This chapter of the Volunteers of America serves 1,500 clients every night in the Sacramento and Northern Nevada area. There are 300 staff people operating several programs, including the shelter on Bannon Street, drug and alcohol treatment programs, and programs for women & children as well as single adults.

Presently, Ray and Lee are painting another mural for Self-help Housing at Francis House. They work well as a team, and would like to continue doing original hand-painted murals as a way of life.

## Untitled

by Misha-Rose

Sometimes though we have to fight,  
We must continue to do what's right.  
No matter how hard the trail may get,  
Who would win if we just quit?  
Strange enough it's helped my stride,  
Occasionally I just sit and cry.  
Why go through life with a frown?  
That would bring everyone else down.  
Always question your own true heart,  
Do you live as God would want?

## Something is Changing

by Elizabeth Halloway

Have you ever noticed that birds  
sing more at year's end? It's as  
'tho these angelic messengers  
take all our hopes, in joyous  
excitement to heaven. In anticipa-  
tion they swirl in loving spirals of  
rhythmic dance.

There's a spring feel to the air. A  
close look of branches with their  
vines is precious to me. Yellow  
daisies in a courtyard seem  
more brilliant. A pale pink  
camellia melts my heart.



A child gave me a  
real flower and an

imaginary cup of coffee this  
morning, and a squirrel jumped on  
a chair next to me to greet me in  
the park. Something is changing  
inside, not because it has to, just  
because it is. There's more life  
than death. Maybe getting deeply  
in tune with my self-destructive  
side has cleared some  
impediment, even 'tho it feels  
lonely. Yet it's almost serene.

I know why street people are  
instantly angry now. The suffering  
I see is an envelope keeping hope  
out. But today, new year's day,  
there's a break in the seal. Here,  
it is bearable.

### Serving With Dignity

By Daniel N. Howe

A rocket blasts into space...  
dragging flames...  
knotted with gray exhaust...  
What a feat!  
Someone's silver dollars flash...  
in the sunlight...

Then I begin to wonder...  
What new whizzing gizz...  
bears responsibility...  
for those who don't buy it...  
Which chain of command...  
gives back to the land...

And which nation remembers...  
its native tongues...  
or even its culture...  
its healing herbs...  
connectedness...  
to all things...

The homeless people do...  
They found the ball of thread...  
followed it down empty streets...  
through dumpboxes...  
between buildings...  
under bridges...

It laced through needles...  
and broken bottles...  
shopping carts...  
and pop cans...  
Then finally...  
came to an end...

It brought them back...  
to where we all started...  
together...  
in community...  
in service to the earth...  
and each other...

with Dignity...



Sacramento City Code Section 12.52.030 states: "It is unlawful and a public nuisance for any person to camp, occupy camp facilities, or use camp paraphernalia in the following areas:  
A. Any public property; ..."

### Obituary

Leon Winter  
d. 12/02  
cause unknown

Kris Fleming  
d. 1/23/03  
killed in fire

Richard Brock  
d. 1/23/03  
homicide

Mary Elizabeth Scott  
d. 1/26/03  
homicide

Johnnie Svecity  
d. 2/15/03  
cause unknown

Franck Hinch  
d. 3/4/03  
cause unknown

Michael Gouthier  
d. 3/7/03  
cause unknown

Joanne Merritt  
d. 3/16/03  
chemical imbalance



Rights were written to protect Liberty.

If only criminals need Rights, then only criminals need Liberty.