



Officials: County homeless effort making progress

By Sam Womack/Staff Writer



Lompoc Mayor Dick DeWees speaks at the press conference Wednesday about the progress of the countywide plan called “Bringing Our Community Home: The Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.” Seated, from left, 5th District Supervisor Joe Centeno, Jeanette Duncan and Sylvia Barnard. //Bryan Walton/Staff

They rest atop park benches and sleep beneath bridges and overpasses or huddled in a sheltering doorway, and oftentimes end up locked up in the county jail.

But the race is on to get Santa Barbara County’s chronically homeless and exceedingly vulnerable population into permanent residences once and for all.

A countywide plan dubbed “Bringing Our Community Home: The Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness” is two years into the decade, and making progress toward its utopian goal.

“Regardless of the prejudice against homeless (individuals) ... remember that it’s someone’s father or mother or son or daughter,” said Lompoc Mayor Dick DeWees at a press conference Wednesday that highlighted the progress of the plan so far.

Since 2007, 344 chronically homeless individuals and families have been placed in permanent housing, according to the multi-agency collaboration.

Also in the past two years, nearly 500 units of affordable housing — 217 of which are for the chronically homeless — have been completed or are under development in Lompoc, Santa Maria and on the South Coast.

“We’re taking them from under bridges and out of the bushes and giving them a home,” said 5th

District Supervisor Joe Centeno, who also spoke at the Wednesday press conference.

As more than 70 countywide organizations and agencies put their heads together to assist the exposed and unprotected segment of society, more services are made available to those in need.

Bringing Our Community Home has put together a homeless services locator online that provides information on over 50 agencies in Santa Barbara County.

“We’re seeing more and more homeless in general,” said Sylvia Barnard, executive director of the Good Samaritan Shelter in Santa Maria.

“The online (database) helps us connect clients with other service providers and get them closer to self-sufficiency,” she said.

Also, Bringing Our Community Home is close to basing a discharge planner in the Santa Barbara County jail for homeless inmates, because often displaced peoples find themselves behind bars.

Sheriff’s deputy Geoff Banks said the additional position would help law-enforcement officers who feel “frustrated” and “hopeless” over the situation.

While the chronically homeless represent only 10 percent of the population, more than

50 percent of the funding aimed at homelessness is spent in that high-needs group, according to Bringing Our Community Home.

In Santa Barbara County, that translates to nearly 950 individuals using more than \$18 million in services and assistance annually.

Individuals who repeatedly end up on the street or in hospitals and jail cells often struggle with alcohol or drug addictions, and have undiagnosed or untreated mental illnesses.

In Santa Maria the homeless population is slightly different than on the South Coast, as generally there are more homeless families than individuals.

For the first two years of the group’s effort, the focus was on the South Coast with a majority of the programs.

Barnard said she means to see that, over the upcoming years, those services make their way to the North County.

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