

# Letters

(See below for news story on the "get-tough" policy against homeless)

## Appalled by 'abatement' of homeless

To the Editor:

I was appalled to read about the attitudes toward homeless people in Venice ("New get-tough policy by city, agencies targets 'street people' encampments," *The Argonaut*, May 23rd.

While it was unclear whether any of the people quoted in the article actually live in Venice, their support for the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD)

"homeless abatement program" was unsettling nevertheless.

Do these worthy citizens consider homeless people some sort of insects that should be abated?

Comments such as "We don't want to become a police state, but ..." and "They brought in trash trucks and took everything (homeless people's possessions) away" seem to imply that a police state is okay for the poor and

distressed.

Homeless people, not poverty, is the "problem" for those who would gentrify Venice.

Most of the gentrifiers are newcomers to Venice, while quite a number of homeless people have lived here for many years.

Most of these did not start out as homeless, but were driven out of their homes — and into the streets or campers — by increas-

ing rents.

Are they not residents of Venice just because they don't have a fixed address? Are they deprived of their rights because they are homeless?

It has become socially unacceptable to express attitudes like these about people of other races, but it seems to be open season on the homeless.

After they're removed — abated — from Venice, will Oakwood be next?

Many Oakwood residents would say there is already an Oakwood Abatement Program under way.

The immediate complaint of the gentrifiers was about homeless people gathering on Third Avenue between Sunset and Rose Avenues.

In fact, this is an industrial area, which is largely deserted at night. There are no homes there where residents would be inconvenienced.

Even so, the encampment of the homeless in areas like Third Avenue could easily be avoided if the homeless were not run off the beach. I have personally witnessed apparent homeless people who were peacefully sitting in a pagoda area on the Venice Boardwalk being told by LAPD that they were loitering.

The U.S. Supreme Court threw out loitering as a crime some years ago.

And, homeless people who have campers are forced to park on the streets of Venice because the City of Los Angeles closes the beach parking lots to campers and residents alike at night.

The homeless are also at-

tacked for taking care of their bodily functions in public areas, as if they were animals.

Again, this is a case of necessity because the beach toilets are locked up at sunset.

The gentrifiers want to dump our homeless on Santa Monica, which doesn't have enough shelters for its homeless.

When will they understand that homelessness is endemic to our economic system and will be with us — in every community — until we start paying more attention to the war on poverty and less to the military budget.

Venice Chamber of Commerce president Mary Richert is quoted as saying, "I would like to see this as a model neighborhood and thriving business community."

I would only urge that she expand her view to wanting a thriving community of people of all economic means.

The Venice Peace and Freedom Party, which includes the housed and the homeless, condemns the mean-spirited prejudices against the least fortunate among us.

We would like to see a broad dialogue on these issues, one that includes representatives of the homeless.

Venice has long been a caring community with food banks, a tradition of sharing and a harmonious diversity of race, cultures and economic status.

We are not about to give up our spirit in the name of gentrification.

James Smith  
Co-chair

Venice Peace and Freedom Party

***"The Venice Peace and Freedom Party, which includes the housed and the homeless, condemns the mean-spirited prejudices against the least fortunate among us."***

If you support justice and human rights for the homeless, poor and working people, then join the Peace and Freedom Party.

Your P&F voter registration can help us become your voice on the California ballot.

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**Venice:**

# New get-tough policy by city, agencies targets 'street people' encampments

BY CINDY FRAZIER

Venice's traditionally laid-back attitude toward "street people" is being replaced with a new get-tough attitude and a concerted effort by police and community members to rid the streets of homeless and vagrants.

During the past several months, a coordinated effort among local service agencies, neighborhood groups, police, and city officials has resulted in a marked decrease in the number of people living on Venice's streets and sidewalks and sleeping on the beach.

The effort was spearheaded by members of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Pacific Area Community Police Advisory Board, which became aware of a rising number of complaints in January, according to organizers.

"The program has been very

successful," said Mary Richert, of the Venice Family Clinic, the Rose Avenue-based free clinic.

Richert is also president of the Venice Chamber of Commerce.

"Since February, things were worse [in Venice]," Richert added. "There was an encampment on Third Avenue south of Rose Avenue."

Amy Nation, director of operations at St. Joseph Center, a Venice service agency for homeless and needy persons, agreed with Richert.

"It's gotten a lot better," Nation said.

"We want to keep the flavor of Venice and to help people, but not to have people living on the sidewalks.

"I would like to see this as a model neighborhood and thriving business community.

"We're off and running" with the homeless abatement program, Nation said.

"We have learned a lot about what it takes to deal with this problem."

**OTHER AREAS** — Richert credits LAPD Capt. Wally Graves, Pacific Area commanding officer, with providing targeted law enforcement for the area, but many other city agencies were also involved.

Graves said that the Venice effort is just the first of an area-wide program to rid the area of

campers and street-dwellers.

"We aren't just targeting Venice, we're going into Mar Vista, Del Rey and Palms," he said.

"This is a division-wide program. We are now taking care of a number of people living near the Marina Freeway entrance [Route 90]," he said.

The homeless abatement program involves police, the city attorney's office, nuisance abatement, street inspectors, mental health workers, and others who are working together to move homeless persons out of the area.

**'TENT CITY'** — An encampment — or mini-tent city — of people who set up housekeeping on Third Avenue between Sunset and Rose Avenues was moved out by police officers Wednesday, April 24th, according to Richert.

"They brought in trash trucks and took everything away," Richert said.

The encampment included some dozen persons who set up tents on private property and also spilled out onto the public sidewalks, she said.

The street-dwellers made money by gathering recyclables and selling them to itinerant trash-haulers who frequent the area, she said.

"They had quite a business going," she said.

Nation said outreach workers

from her agency were able to assist some of the campers.

"We helped many of them find services, beyond emergency shelter," Nation said.

"It [the homeless abatement program] is a great example of teamwork between all the city services and local agencies."

## HOMELESS INCREASE

Nation said that the economic downturn and the fallout from September 11th have resulted in an increase of homeless in the city and particularly in Venice.

Summertime also brings an influx of young people from other areas who head west to Venice Beach after school lets out, she said.

"There has been an increase of people from out-of-state, who we call the 'summer set,'" Nation said.

"But the layoffs in the hotels and tourism industry has increased the overall numbers."

Nation said that Venice's traditional tolerance for down-and-out people has not changed, but the laissez-faire attitude of the past is gone.

"We don't want to be a police state, but LA has to find places for these people to go," she said.

Nation said her agency frequently dispatches homeless persons to Santa Monica's Samoshel shelter, because Venice has no such shelter.