Downtown San Diego Clean & Safe

Media Update

Tuesday, January 10, 2017
Homeless Outreach Program Reunites Families

Dave Schwab | November 4, 2016

The Downtown San Diego Partnership, through its Clean & Safe Program and sponsored by Sharp HealthCare, recently passed a milestone, having reunitied 1,000 Downtown San Diego homeless people with their families and loved ones nationwide.

Launched in 2011, the comprehensive Family Reunification Program enables Clean & Safe homeless outreach coordinators to identify the homeless who will benefit most by returning home.

Under the program, family and friends are contacted to ensure the displaced person will have a place to stay once reunited, as well as the support they need to get resettled. Once confirmed, the outreach team offers the individual transportation necessary to reconnect with their support system.

One homeless woman who was returned home thanks to the program is 30-year-old Jennifer Epps, a disabled homeless military veteran, who found herself stranded and temporarily out on the street after moving from Alabama to San Diego.

“I came out to move in with a former Marine’s wife, but I didn’t know that they had gotten a divorce,” said Epps, whose situation turned sour soon after arrival. She discovered her hoped-for home was in eviction and suddenly found herself out on the streets without any money.

“All my stuff was gone — my computer laptop, even my phone was gone,” Epps said. “I didn’t know what to do.”

With the aid of Veterans Village of San Diego, Epps found shelter at San Diego Rescue Mission’s Downtown campus for a few nights, before being referred to the Family Reunification Program.

“They gave me a bus ticket to come home to Alabama,” Epps said. “All I did was tell them my situation. I had somewhere I could go in a crisis. They’d helped out three other people right before me. It was a blessing. It really was.”

Kris Michell, president/CEO of the Downtown San Diego Partnership, talked of how the program got started — and its dynamic and positive impact.

“The recognition that family is one of the strongest bonds we have was the driving force behind the creation of the Family Reunification Program, which is sponsored by Sharp HealthCare,” Michell said. “The program gives individuals an opportunity to get back on their feet and end their cycle of homelessness.”

“We are pleasantly surprised with the success of the Family Reunification Program,” Michell said. “Reconnecting homeless individuals with loved ones has resulted in not only getting and keeping people off the street, but reuniting them with friends and family in a loving and safe environment.”
Michell said that while “finding answers to homelessness is challenging,” efforts like the reunification program prove it is possible and she expects the program to continue as long as homeless exist in San Diego.

“A strong support system is essential for all of us and reconnecting these individuals with friends, family, and supportive services effectively ends their cycle of homelessness,” Michell said.

The tremendous achievement of the reunification program has been made possible through generous sponsorships. In addition to Sharp HealthCare, additional support and contributions have come from AT&T, Bank of America, California Apartment Association, the County of San Diego, Cox Communications, Jerry and Eleanor Navarra of Jerome’s Furniture, The Mansour Group Inc., San Diego Gas & Electric, Travelers Aid San Diego, Underground Elephant, Union Bank, and the William D. Lynch Company.

“This amazing program has ended homelessness for 1,000 individuals and should be widely applauded,” said Dan Gross, executive vice president of Sharp HealthCare. “I encourage more organizations in San Diego to support this proven solution, which works with people living on the streets to renew relationships with family and friends in a supportive environment.”

Another beneficiary of the Family Reunification Program was a homeless man named Jerry, who heard about the program during a visit to St. Vincent de Paul. Jerry is a homeless veteran who found himself on the streets after struggling with unemployment and alcoholism.

Once he connected with Clean & Safe’s outreach coordinators, they were able to reunite him with both family and a veteran treatment program in his home state of Missouri.

“The Family Reunification Program changes lives forever,” said Alonso Vivas, executive director of Clean & Safe. “It gives hope to some of the most vulnerable members of our Downtown community. It’s been an incredible journey so far and this is just the beginning.”

To learn more about the Downtown San Diego Partnership and the Clean & Safe Program, please visit downtownsandiego.org.

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**Children's Park Redo on Tap – Again**

Roger Showley | November 11, 2016


Children’s Park downtown was all dressed up for its grand opening on the eve of the 1996 Republican national convention in San Diego. But now, it’s acting like a juvenile delinquent.

Few people visit the 1.2-acre park at Front Street and Harbor Drive. The police are called regularly to deal with drug use, drinking and other issues. And nearby residents complain about street people who camp out under the Canary Island pine trees and relieve themselves in the Civic Pond.

The Civic Pond, 220 feet in diameter, is no fun. Signs warn against wading in the 14-inch-deep watery art piece by renowned landscape architect Peter Walker. And maintenance crews have to fish out detritus, from litter and feces to a recently found floating television set.

“At night everybody avoids the place because it’s dark and the homeless and transients are all over the place,” said Gary Smith, president of the Downtown Residents Group.
Civic San Diego, whose predecessor used $2.8 million in downtown redevelopment money to build the 2.1-acre park, is trying to remedy the many problems with $3.6 million in funds from downtown developer fees. It’s holding a public workshop to seek ideas at 6 p.m. Wednesday at City Hall’s North Terrace Rooms 207-209, overlooking the San Diego Concourse, 202 C St.

“Right now there’s nothing to enjoy,” said CivicSD’s vice president for planning, Brad Richter. “You can admire the pond, but aside from that, it’s just a forest.”

The agency, which oversees downtown development for the City Council, previously approved a similarly priced plan in 2011 that would have added a restroom, snackbar and play equipment, and replaced trees with grass and pavement. But the effort stalled when redevelopment ended. Now it’s coming back to life, partly at the request of downtown residents who want a dog park or dog run.

Glen Schmidt, whose landscape architecture firm prepared the 2011 plan, said he and his staff are leading the workshop, ready to see if there are any better ideas to inject new life into a forgotten corner of town.

If the cost is higher, CivicSD would have to rejigger its park funding priorities. The tentative schedule calls for completing a new design over the next year and starting construction in mid-2018 for completion a year later.

“It was really meant as more of an art piece (in 1996) than a highly functional, amenitized park, which worked at the time,” when relatively few people had moved downtown, Schmidt said. “Now we have 40,000 people living downtown and the demographics, the needs, are different.”

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The park was dedicated to children, partly to get political support, but it never had any child-oriented play equipment. The only time wading was tolerated was on opening day.

Immediately west is the New Children’s Museum that opened in 2008. A one-acre, $2.6 million child-oriented park across Island Avenue includes swings and other play equipment.

Originally Children’s Park contained attractively landscaped mounds that have since been removed to provide better sight lines for police patrols. There are benches and seating blocks but graffiti and vandalism have besmirched some of them, and the grass died during the drought when sprinklers were turned off.

Alonso Vivas, executive of the Downtown San Diego Partnership’s Clean and Safe program, said his staff patrol the perimeter of the park but are not legally authorized to go into the park to deal with security problems. They receive complaints from the public several times a week and alert the police several times a month if a crime is taking place. A monthly count of homeless sleeping overnight in the park ranges showed 13 on one night, five on another.

“While everybody’s doing the best they can, I think redesigning it is going to go a long way,” Vivas said. “If it’s designed properly and we get people to use it, there’s going to be less illegal activity happening inside there.”

Joan “Jingles” O’Brien, 55, was arranging her jewelry on a bench last week so she could photograph it for sale online. She’s homeless but doesn’t sleep in Children’s Park.

“I leave after dark,” she said, heading for East Village. “It’s one of the parks that’s kind of rough at night.”

She said she hopes any changes include a restroom and a dog run — she had her four small dogs in her cart along with other personal items.

California Aquatics contractor Alberto Salgado, 24, spends about two hours daily Monday through Friday cleaning the pool and checking the chemicals.

He tells stories of daily encounters with street people, who regularly wash or shower in the pond, including one woman who stripped naked to take a shower beneath the spigots. On another occasion, Salgado’s assistant was accosted by a different woman but by the time police arrived, she was gone.

“It’s the craziest thing,” he said of the stuff he removes from the pool. He’s found clothes, a suitcase and that floating TV.

Salgado, who lives in City Heights, said the pool should be reconfigured for waders — an idea proposed five years ago. He also endorsed adding playground equipment.
“It’s a nice park,” he said. “You’d want to bring your kids.”

If there was something for them to do in a place called Children’s Park.

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**In the Agony of Childbirth, a Homeless Woman Finds Help**

Dan McSwain | November 23, 2016

We can agree that a sidewalk in San Diego is no place to give birth. Yet amid the city’s lost tribe of homeless people, a woman’s body had other plans.

“I hear a woman screaming in a tent, and it sounds like something awful,” said Phillip Denton, who was working as a security guard for downtown’s Clean and Safe, a quasi-government agency that scrubs pavement and patrols the neighborhood.

Denton was making his usual rounds on the afternoon of Sept. 10, a Saturday, when a dispatcher directed him to check on the welfare of a homeless woman camped in the East Village, near the corner of 14th and G streets.

After establishing that she wasn’t being murdered and noting her pregnancy, Denton asked her to report her pain level. It was “10” on a scale of 10.

Still, the woman refused medical help. Absolutely no 911 call for her, please.

Clean and Safe rules prohibit its “ambassadors” from delivering first aid or even touching the homeless. So Denton and his supervisor gently persuaded the soon-to-be mother to submit to a rudimentary exam, conducted by a homeless woman who lived nearby.

“The tent was dirty; blankets, roaches and probably mice,” Denton said.

The prognosis was obvious: Ready or not, a baby was coming soon.

This reality changed the mind that mattered most. Within minutes, the woman consented to be scooped up by paramedics and transported to Scripps Mercy Hospital.

Here the story trails off. Citing privacy regulations, no hospital, fire department or nonprofit official will disclose what happened next. On the bright side, county records show no deceased homeless infants that day.

I picked up clues that a mother and newborn baby survived, and landed a day or two later in a shelter for homeless women and their children. Here again, strict privacy rules prevent me from confirmation. And I’m not naming the shelter, which also hides victims from violent domestic abusers.

But that was more than two months ago. At least once a week I’ve walked a grid in the East Village area where the security guard may have saved a life, or two. Nobody claims to know the pregnant woman, street name “Lady,” who went into labor on the sidewalk.
Are they OK or back on the street? Getting decent food and clothing? What about checkups for that baby?

Forget about answers for a second. Even such questions can bring me to tears.

We can suppose that this mother was disabled by mental illness, at least temporarily. After all, experts estimate such illness afflicts 80 percent of the chronically homeless people living outdoors.

Yet we don’t need experts for this one. Rational people don’t refuse medical attention while enduring the agony of childbirth inside a filthy tent.

Perhaps her moment of clarity will persist. Studies suggest that about four-fifths of homeless people are unhoused only temporarily, and soon muster the resources to return to traditional society. About 10 percent skip off the bottom, while the remaining 10 percent never recover.

It’s those people, that chronic and hopeless tenth, who’ve been effectively abandoned by San Diego’s political leaders to its sidewalks, parks and canyons.

Over the decade from 2007 through January of this year, San Diego County’s population of unsheltered chronically homeless surged by a deplorable 54 percent, from 707 to 1,087 people.

No, the magnets of great weather and lavish welfare don’t explain such growth. Los Angeles County, with the same climate and larger subsidies, has cut its chronic population by 29 percent (to a still-catastrophic 12,354 people). Salt Lake City is down 98 percent, Houston is down 86 percent, and the U.S. overall is down 32 percent.

In our burgeoning failure to house the most vulnerable, San Diego stands alone. We are a national disgrace.

Local politicians, always quick to boast when programs are launched, tend toward excuses when confronted with such results. San Diego is different, we’re told, an exception. It’s all very complicated.

The reality is quite simple: Like most of California, San Diego has used zoning and fees to make it harder over time to build new houses and apartments, causing shortage and swiftly rising prices. This has produced what economists call a “market failure” when it comes to low-cost apartments, prompting local governments to subsidize their production in keeping with state and federal law.

Except that San Diego has been exceptionally averse to building homes for the poor, and rather fond of destroying them.

As uncovered this month by Union-Tribune Watchdog reporter James DeHaven, San Diego has removed about 10,000 “affordable” dwellings from its rolls over the last six years, neatly canceling out the entire total that the city’s housing commission opened going all the way back to 1979.

My analysis of commission data shows even worse trends at the lowest tier of the subsidy strata, with just 543 permanent units designated for the homeless over the last decade. When it comes to government handouts, the pathetic and deranged just can’t compete with healthy low-income families.

Such neglect imposes a tangible cost. If a sidewalk is no place for a baby, living outdoors is practically a fatal disease for adults.

The average life expectancy for a chronically homeless person is variously estimated from 42 to 52, compared to 79 for the rest of us. They have all the diseases of the general population, plus Third World conditions ranging from scurvy to disorders of the skin and foot.

Yet untreated mental illness, from major depression to schizophrenia to addiction, is by far the major threat.

The number of people who died while homeless has doubled in San Diego County over just two years — to 117 in the 12 months that ended Sept. 30, surging from 93 last year and 54 over the same period in 2014, according to data from the county medical examiner.
Accidents claimed the most people, with 62 dying this year of causes ranging from falls to overdoses to being hit by cars or trains. Given the population’s size, this ratio dwarfs the accidental death rate in the general population.

Suicide killed 12 homeless people. Two men were found hanged in alleys. Even many of the natural causes bore the hallmarks of untreated mental illness, with complications of chronic alcoholism leading that list.

Relatively few of the homeless are women, yet they may suffer more, along with their children.

I discussed health recently with Lisa Marie Mitchell, a native San Diegan who at 50 has been living on the streets off and on since 18.

“I took the wrong path and starting using drugs,” she said, her eyes glazed at 8:30 a.m. So I asked what drugs. “Vodka,” came her instant reply.

Mitchell told me she’d given birth to seven children over the years and given all up for adoption. I have no way of verifying her account, but she wasn’t bragging.

Then she caught me looking at her swollen belly. No, Mitchell wasn’t pregnant again. Instead, the doctor said her abdomen was distended by cirrhosis of the liver, a diagnosis that includes pancreatitis and mental illness, promising her a slow, painful death.

Are such people best left alone? Will enough suffering on the streets compel them to eventually pull themselves together?

Such logic escapes me. It’s hard to see how a population incapable of feeding itself or showering properly will suddenly find the means to hold jobs, pay for apartments, take psych meds on time. If we don’t put them in housing and offer steady medical help, nobody will.

Realizing the abstract nature of statistics, some homeless advocates have reached for better symbols.

On the cloudy Sunday afternoon of Nov. 6, a saxophonist played “Goin’ Up Yonder” to a small group near the steps of the county administration building. We were waiting for the start of an annual vigil held by San Diego Rescue Mission for the homeless who died the year before.

In due course Herb Johnson, the Rescue’s chief executive, turned the corner leading a column of volunteers who had walked through downtown carrying pairs of used shoes to represent each dead person.

After comments from ministers, a rabbi, priest and Buddhist monk, volunteers read the names of the deceased. The interfaith speakers invoked the heartfelt truths you’d expect: Homeless people are properly seen as our brothers and sisters, not as discards.

Johnson, who runs a major shelter and rehabilitation center with no public funding, was just as passionate about the sudden increase in misery he has been seeing. Most of all, he wanted the public to comprehend the fatal nature of homelessness, even in sunny San Diego.

“It ain’t life on the Big Easy,” he said.
Theories abound about the reasons for booming homelessness downtown but no one can explain exactly why it’s booming.

Since January alone, a business group’s monthly census has shown a 68 percent spike in street homelessness downtown. The count peaked at nearly 1,400 in August and has since hovered around 1,130. More tents line city blocks and more homeless people cluster near freeway on-ramps, businesses and homeless services.

Some local leaders have said Proposition 47, a state ballot initiative that downgraded some felonies to misdemeanors in an effort to reduce the state prison population, is a significant culprit. Others have speculated about the impact of high rents, an influx of homeless people from other areas and even the way the homeless population is counted.

Homeless service providers and data gurus aren’t so sure what’s driving the massive uptick.

We need a really comprehensive, in-depth look at what’s going on,” said Amy Gonyeau, chief operating officer of nonprofit Alpha Project.

Here’s what we know and don’t know about street homelessness downtown.

The Numbers

Two groups track homelessness downtown.

The best-known annual census is conducted by the Regional Task Force on the Homeless, which sends volunteers out countywide to count those living on the street and in shelters between 4 a.m. and 7 a.m. one morning in late January.

This year’s point-in-time count revealed an 8 percent drop in overall homelessness citywide but a 21 percent increase in street homelessness in downtown census tracts. The group counted more than 1,000 people on downtown streets.

A monthly survey organized by the Downtown San Diego Partnership, a business group, has gotten more attention this year as the homeless population booms.

Homeless outreach workers with the Downtown Partnership fan out across 275 city blocks between midnight and 5 a.m. the last Thursday of the month.

Here are the totals they’ve recorded since they started taking counts in 2012.
Clearly, something’s changed this year.

**The Tent Factor**

As street homelessness increases, so too has the number of homeless San Diegans with tents – and that affects the numbers.

Since 2012, the Downtown Partnership has assumed two people are sleeping in each tent outreach workers come across. But the group doesn’t report the number of tents they see, making it difficult to conclude how much tents could be increasing the monthly count.

Alonso Vivas, who supervises the Downtown Partnership’s homelessness efforts, admits the approach isn’t foolproof. He said one could argue it may also undercount the population.

The Downtown Partnership’s opted to stick with that method because it allows them to better compare data over time, Vivas said. “We want to stay consistent.”

This January, the Regional Task Force counted more than 200 tents downtown, a 52 percent increase from last year. Then they assumed 1.72 people were sleeping in each one which translates into about a third of the more than 1,000 homeless counted on downtown streets this January.

**San Diego’s Homeless Hub**

Downtown San Diego has long been the regional headquarters for homeless services. It’s a place where homeless folks can get a meal, a shower or a shelter bed – resources that aren’t as plentiful elsewhere.

Many have told me they came downtown or have stayed there for that reason, even if they aren’t looking for shelter.

“All the resources are here,” said Thomas Easthope, 51, who I met last week near Fault Line Park in East Village.

Easthope and others stress that life downtown isn’t easy. They’re frustrated with police enforcement, weekly sidewalk clean-ups and an increasing population in a time of much construction and development that’s forcing homeless people into smaller areas.

“They’re jamming us in one place,” Easthope said.

Still, the draw endures – for now.

Dolores Diaz, who leads the Regional Task Force on the Homeless, said the data her group’s collected seems to show homeless San Diegans are migrating within the region, especially to downtown census tracts.

That might explain one seemingly contradictory takeaway from this year’s countywide count. Street homelessness actually fell nearly 1 percent citywide from 2015 to 2016 but rose downtown.

**The Prop. 47 Effect**

In Nov. 2014, California voters approved Prop. 47, reducing certain felonies to misdemeanors. It gave authorities less power to crack down on repeat drug and property crime offenders and to persuade them to enroll in treatment programs. It also led to the release of tens of thousands statewide from prisons and probation terms.

In the two years since, the downtown homeless population has more than doubled – and some local officials have been quick to note the circumstances.

City Councilwoman Lorie Zapf and a chief deputy city attorney wearied over the challenges the initiative has wrought at a recent town hall meeting.

“It is clear to everyone, even though the statistics are lagging, that since the implementation of Prop. 47, it correlates with the increase in these aggressive transients, with these thefts, with the crazy amount of drug use that we’re seeing out on the
streets, like right out in the open, right now,” said Zapf, who is most focused on homelessness in the beach communities she represents.

Before Prop. 47, Zapf said, drug offenders facing greater punishment had an incentive to enter rehabilitation programs that might help them move past addiction. Now, she argued, they’re increasingly ending up on the street without the help they need.

Meanwhile, homeless outreach workers and other downtown groups have noted increased drug and gang activity among the homeless population, especially in East Village. The Downtown San Diego Partnership has said workers who clean and watch over downtown streets as part of the group’s Clean and Safe Program are increasingly being assaulted on the job.

Data recently released by SANDAG, the regional planning agency, underlines the vulnerability of drug offenders and their risk of homelessness – and how that might be changing post-Prop. 47.

In 2013, 56 percent of drug arrestees interviewed by the agency as part of a years-long analysis reported they’d ever been homeless. Of those, 28 percent said they were homeless when they were arrested.

Two years later, with Prop. 47 in effect, 62 percent of arrestees reported they’d ever been homeless and 40 percent of those said they were currently homeless.

Yet many nonprofit leaders and other officials are hesitant to publicly claim cause and effect. They aren’t specifically tracking who’s moving onto downtown streets or monitoring folks who might otherwise be jailed or on probation.

What they do know is that 14 percent of unsheltered homeless folks surveyed by the task force reported they were on probation or parole and 62 percent countywide reported they’d served time in jail, prison or juvenile hall. Of those, 85 percent said they’d been released within the last five years.

Division Chief Gonzalo Mendez of the San Diego County Probation Department is familiar with those numbers and anecdotes about Prop. 47. He regularly attends monthly meetings focused on coordinating homeless-serving efforts countywide and is concerned drug offenders once easier to help push into treatment aren’t getting that treatment.

But he thinks more research is needed to draw a direct correlation between Prop. 47 and rising street homelessness.

“I don’t know what the answer is,” Mendez said. “I know we have 2,700 less offenders (on probation) but we can’t say all those people are homeless or don’t have a place to live.”

Diaz of the Regional Task Force also argued the data the homeless-serving community has now isn’t enough to conclude that Prop. 47 is driving increases in street homelessness downtown.

“I don’t think we should say that Prop. 47 has anything to do with it,” Diaz said.

Who’s Coming In

San Diego’s mild climate and stories about homeless folks being bused in feed a common notion that much of the region’s homeless population could be coming from elsewhere. That theory’s also been circulated as street homelessness grows downtown.

But the most reliable data indicates more than two-thirds of homeless San Diegans ended up on the streets while living in San Diego rather than move here after they became homeless.

Downtown San Diego Partnership CEO Kris Michell has often said many homeless folks who settle downtown aren’t from San Diego and that this may make it different than other parts of the county.

At a town hall last month, Michell said about 70 percent of homeless people her workers had surveyed reported they came from outside California.

But that statistic is based on reports from participants in the organization’s family reunification program, which helps homeless people reconnect with family members.
“We don’t extrapolate that to apply to the entire population of homeless people downtown,” spokeswoman Angela Wells said.

This detail matters. Someone who is seeking help to reunite with family members is more likely to have family outside California or at least San Diego County.

Other data, though imperfect, tells a different story.

This year, about 70 percent of unsheltered homeless folks countywide interviewed by the Regional Task Force said they’d become homeless in San Diego. About a quarter reported becoming homeless elsewhere.

A downtown-focused effort in 2014 drew similar conclusions. Two-thirds of the more than 2,200 homeless folks surveyed downtown reported they lived in San Diego County before they became homeless and nearly 70 percent said they hailed from Southern California. And again, just under a quarter reported living elsewhere before they ended up on the street.

Raul Palomino, executive director of homeless-serving Presbyterian Urban Ministries in Sherman Heights, said he believes the trend has shifted recently.

Palomino, whose organization that helps homeless folks secure IDs and birth certificates necessary for long-term aid, said he’s noticed an uptick in clients from outside San Diego. He acknowledged many of those clients come via a more recent partnership with a private prisons operator that uses his service to prepare clients to move out of halfway houses.

“Lately, it’s been more people who are brand new to San Diego,” he said.

Affordable Housing Shortage

San Diego’s rising rents and low vacancy rates are especially daunting for would-be tenants with past evictions, low credit scores and limited cash.

And there are now fewer than half as many units in downtown residential hotels that once served as a last-ditch option folks who might otherwise be homeless. Many have shuttered or started charging more.

A Housing Commission survey last fall concluded the city was home to just 3,872 single-room occupancy units – fewer than half of the citywide stock reported in 2003.

Homeless advocates are adamant the loss of those units, many of which were downtown, is contributing to the downtown homelessness crisis.

“The SROs were the safety net,” said Jim Lovell, who leads the downtown Third Avenue Charitable Organization.

Lovell, whose organization serves meals and connects homeless clients to other services, said the $750 to $800 monthly SRO rates he’s seen recently are out of reach for many seniors and people with disabilities.

Many SROs that remain aren’t inviting, either.

Lovell said one client who’d spent years on the street found work and nabbed an SRO for $650 a month only to be preyed upon by bed bugs. That lasted a couple months.

Now he’s back on the street.

Lovell suspects there are many stories like that – and even more stories of homeless folks who might have avoided that scenario years ago.

“People who typically, in years gone by, would just be not outside, just barely not outside, are back outside,” Lovell said.
How to be Busy and Important this Month in San Diego

Christina Orlovsky | November 28, 2016

December 1: Combine culture and craft beer at La Jolla Playhouse’s Thirsty Thursday, featuring complimentary pours from Border X Brewing and an extended-run performance of the musical Miss You Like Hell.

December 2: Have yourself a Merry-Achi Christmas, performed by Mariachi Sol de Mexico at Balboa Theatre. Check off your holiday shopping list Friday and Saturday with unique gifts at the Queen Bee Market Holiday Show.

December 3: Belt out a holiday tune during Carols & Barrels, a benefit for Cancer for College at the Pavilion on Broadway Pier. Expect no filter from one of comedy’s most famous women, Amy Schumer, onstage at Valley View Casino Center.

Have a buon Natale at the Little Italy Tree Lighting and Christmas Village.

December 4: Sample the city’s best craft beer and chili—and take home a souvenir ceramic bowl—at the SoNo Fest and Chili Cook-Off.

Scope out some of North County’s most beautifully decorated homes during the 30th Annual Holiday Homes Tour.

Indulge in a Taste of the Turf Club—and your last chance this season to bet on the ponies—on Closing Day at the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club.

December 9: Welcome to the jungle—Jungle Bells, that is—San Diego Zoo’s annual holiday celebration of festive lights, treats, and Santa Claus (through January 2).

December 10: Show your giving spirit and support local artisans during the Makers Arcade Holiday Fair at the Port Pavilion on Broadway Pier.

December 12: Watch Tony Award—winning Broadway star (and San Diego native!) Brian Stokes Mitchell perform at Simply Broadway, a benefit concert supporting the La Jolla Playhouse and The Actors Fund, a national arts and entertainment organization.

December 14: The Downtown San Diego Partnership will Deck the Halls along B Street downtown, complete with music, food, drinks, and photo ops with Saint Nick himself.
December 16: Hop aboard the holiday train at the San Diego Model Railroad Museum’s Ales ‘n Rails Ugly Christmas Sweater Party.

December 17: Pay tribute to the legendary Gene Wilder with a special screening of Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, courtesy of Cinema @ Balboa.

December 21: Dance with the Sugar Plum Fairy during Moscow Ballet’s The Great Russian Nutcracker.

December 31: Ring in 2017 with the ultimate party of the year: Big Night San Diego at the Hilton Bayfront.

San Diego Charity News for December 2016

Joyce Glazer | December 5, 2016

http://www.sandiegomagazine.com/Blogs/Monday-Morning-Good-News/Fall-2016/United-Through-Reading-Raises-250000/

Bank of America distributed $172,500 in grants to 22 nonprofits on “Giving Tuesday”. Funding will help San Diegan’s gain greater economic mobility through increased access to food, shelter, benefits and other fundamental needs that will enable them to move toward long-term stability. Among those receiving a grant is Downtown San Diego Partnership. Kris Michell, President and CEO of the Downtown San Diego Partnership said, “Their generous donation helps to fund programs like our Family Reunification Program.”

UCSD Opening Permanent Downtown Outpost

Roger Showley | December 12, 2016

In more than 40 years of redevelopment, downtown San Diego has added pricey as well as affordable housing, high-rise office and hotel towers, convention, shopping and sporting meccas and dozens of trendy bars and restaurants.

But now comes what many downtown boosters have dreamed of for decades — a major research university that can attract business, jobs and international attention.

UC San Diego, which previously held classes in rented space, has announced a $42 million, 66,000-square-foot downtown outpost that will be part a much bigger development due for City Council review on Tuesday. Construction is expected to begin next year with completion by late 2020 or early-2021.

When the four-story facility called the “Innovative Cultural and Education Hub” opens at Park Boulevard and Market Street in East Village, students and faculty will conduct field research out of upper-level studios. Campus artists will display art works and perform music, dance and drama pieces. Professors will conduct classes geared to downtown entrepreneurs and the general public. And students from surrounding neighborhoods will learn computer coding and take readiness classes to prepare themselves for college.

“It is a strong signal to the community...that we welcome you and we want you to be part of us and we want to be part of you,” said Chancellor Pradeep Khosla in an interview at his office last week.

Downtown leaders are hailing the move as a major step in making downtown a hub for the new 21st century tech-economy just as UCSD’s campus on Torrey Pines Mesa spun off numerous biotech and telecommunications companies with thousands of well-paid employees since the 1960s.

The university in turn hopes its presence will inspire more students, especially those in lower-income neighborhoods south of Interstate 8, to apply for admission. Campus leaders also aim to attract a wider audience to its artistic and academic offerings that doesn’t require braving the traffic and parking problems in and around the main campus.

“It’s everything we’ve wanted and then some,” said Kris Michell, president and CEO of the Downtown San Diego Partnership business group, which opened a “collaboratory” classroom space with UCSD earlier this year at its office building on B Street.

David Hazan, president of the East Village Association, said UCSD’s commitment should give developers and companies the confidence to move to or grow in downtown as well.

“I think this is just the start and hopefully the dominoes will start to fall once this thing gets going,” he said.

Matt Carlson, a CBRE commercial broker active in downtown office leasing, said the timing could never be better, given dropping vacancy rates, rising rental rates and growing demand for creative office space.

“As soon as UCSD or one of the other big academic institutions puts a beachhead downtown,’ Carlson said potential users told him, “then we’ll know downtown has arrived.”

The building would be part of Holland Partner Group’s $275 million proposed Park & Market project. The university expects to buy the building for an estimated $36.2 million and spend about $6 million in tenant improvements. UCSD’s Extension division has set aside about $4 million from course and program fees for the project and expects to cover the rest from fund-raising and loans.

“Landing a university presence in downtown San Diego is a game changer and the result of years of hard work to make it reality,” said Mayor Kevin Faulconer. “This new project will continue the revitalization of the East Village neighborhood and, with UCSD’s top-notch reputation, provide countless opportunities for collaboration as we prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow.”

The mayor’s deputy chief operating officer for planning and development, David Graham, said the agreement came after years of discussion about how and where UCSD might expand to the city’s business and government center. “I’m about growing companies and helping startups small and medium sizes grow to be large,” Graham said. “I also think there will be companies that want to be close and connected to the activities of the university that will potentially take a second look at coming downtown.”

Beyond officialdom, UCSD’s decision was welcomed by one of its alumni, who has a program to offer at the hub.
Christopher Yanov, a 1999 UCSD graduate in political science and Spanish, runs the Reality Changers program for aspiring college students. He earned his degree while working in the city with gang members in the rough parts of town by night after taking classes all day a world away in La Jolla. He said the new hub will be a logical place to help middle- and high-school students get ready for higher education and careers.

“By coming to the neighborhoods (near downtown) and having a presence on their doorstep, that’s a clear signal to students in those communities that they matter to UCSD,” Yanov said.

It’s too early to know what classes, programs and research will take place at the new hub, but Keith Pezzoli, director of UCSD’s Urban Studies and Planning program, said his students will be natural users of the new location. They will be closer to neighborhoods where they study housing, transportation, “food deserts” and big city initiatives. They also will be surrounded by startups, government agencies and traditional banking, law and real estate businesses with internships, job openings and unlimited networking opportunities.

On the same block will be a 34-story, 426-unit apartment tower with 85 low-income units that graduate students making less than $31,500 could qualify to rent; an outdoor amphitheater event space; and restoration of the historic Remmen House.

A key factor in choosing the site, officials said, was its location on the San Diego Trolley line that is being extended to the campus and set to open by the time the project opens.

Holland would pay the city $12.3 million for the property, bounded by Park Boulevard and 11th, G and Market streets with the proceeds going back into the city’s affordable housing fund. The university anticipates paying Holland about $36.2 million for the office building depending on the actual construction cost, and around $6 million in tenant improvements. UCSD plans to fund its project from nontaxpayer sources, such as an extension course fees, programs, grants and donations and bank loans.

Founded in 2001 in Vancouver, Wash., near Portland, Ore., Holland has developed and manages 30,000 apartments worth $7.5 billion in western states, including 240-unit Form 15 in two blocks east of the UCSD site. But when it came to bidding on the Park & Market project, development director Brent Schertzer said the office component posed substantial risk since the company had not landed any leasing commitments in advance.

“It just happened that UCSD came knocking on our door right about the time we were getting ready to get that (preleasing) started,” Schertzer said.

Planned in the office building are a 3,000-square-foot ground floor public restaurant, classrooms, performance and exhibition spaces and work space for faculty and student researchers and offices for the chancellor, deans and other visiting campus officials. There would be about 92 underground parking spaces for campus use.

The university’s driving force for the move has been Mary Walshok, associate vice chancellor for public programs and dean of extension.

“I think what happened is both the city and the university are ready for a new opportunity,” Walshok said.

Khosla said if the downtown project succeeds, he can imagine UCSD replicating it in Chula Vista, East County and other parts of the region. But he said for now he is not interested in partnering with San Diego State University to redevelop the Qualcomm Stadium property in Mission Valley as has been proposed.

“Superficially, I would think that area belongs more to San Diego State and we need to give them their space to grow,” he said.

UCSD and downtown decision makers have had a direct connection in recent years through the Centre City Development Corp., now operating as Civic San Diego, the city’s downtown development agency. CivicSD Chairman Jeff Gattas is UCSD’s executive director of marketing, media relations and public affairs, and former CCDC/CivicSD President Jeff Graham, no relation to David Graham, is UCSD’s executive director of real estate. Gattas said he has recused himself from voting on the project and Graham said he has been away long enough from CivicSD to eliminate any legal conflicts. Current CivicSD President Reese Jarrett said the UCSD-Holland deal did not figure into recommending the developer.
San Diego Padres 10 Days of Giving 2016

December 13, 2016

On Tuesday, the Padres Foundation teamed up with SDG&E to present the Downtown San Diego Partnership Foundation with a $10,000 check to benefit the Family Reunification Program. This donation, part of the Padres' 10 Days of Giving campaign, will allow our Homeless Outreach Coordinators to reunite more than 50 homeless individuals in Downtown San Diego with their loved ones across the country.

More Than 700 San Diego Homeless Veterans Enroll in Assistance Program

Timothy Rawles | December 20, 2016

“Housing Our Heroes” is getting people off the streets and into homes.

Just over a week after the re-inauguration of San Diego Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer, he and City Councilmember Chris Ward along with the San Diego Housing Commission announced over 700 veterans have enrolled in the “Housing Our Heroes” campaign.

Mayor Faulconer said after the announcement that every veteran who gets off the street and into housing is an example of the push toward eradicating homelessness in San Diego.

“We’re making progress, but we still have more work to do,” he said. “While many landlords have stepped up to take in homeless veterans, we’re asking for even more to open their doors this holiday season and make room for our struggling heroes.”

The mayor said he is adding new tools and enhancing existing programs to better coordinate with San Diego service providers to ease the entire homeless population.

Some of these resources include:

Identifying funding to expand the Downtown San Diego Partnership’s Family Reunification Program, which connects homeless people to family or friends who can provide housing stability while they try to turn their lives around. The City will seek a public-private partnership to fund the expansion.

Increasing the use of the Homeless Management Information System – a software system used by service providers to coordinate care for the region’s homeless individuals. The San Diego Police Department will begin actively using the system to share data with providers on its contacts with homeless individuals.

Activating shelter beds for up to 275 homeless individuals when extreme cold weather conditions strike. The City’s homeless service providers – Father Joe’s Village (250) and Connections Housing (25) – will open their doors during inclement weather and the City is reaching out to other organizations to grow the network.

In March 2015 Mayor Faulconer and the San Diego Housing Commission began the $12.5 million initiative to secure housing for 1,000 homeless veterans in San Diego.

They have nearly reached half of that goal in addition to 254 men and women receiving vouchers and funding for assistance in finding their own apartments.

Landlords across the city have made available 141 units for people looking for homes.

However, rent prices can be a limiting factor for long-term housing, drawing-out the process even more.

“Our Housing Our Heroes goal is within reach, and with the support of property owners in our community this holiday season we can get 1,000 unsheltered veterans into permanent housing opportunities,” Councilmember Ward said.

Ward adds pushing for that benchmark of 1,000 is an ambitious one because so many need special care. But he will continue to rally for more solutions in 2017.

In a release from Mayor Faulconer’s office, they say there are other components to the Housing First - San Diego homelessness action plan which started in November 2014.

"The $12.5 million in federal, City, and Housing Commission resources are being invested to provide housing opportunities for homeless veterans in the city who are living on the streets or in shelters. The funding package includes $4 million in City funds that Mayor Faulconer and the City Council committed to the campaign."

Richard C. Gentry, President & CEO of the San Diego Housing Commission said veterans have certain parts of San Diego in which they wish to live.

“One bedroom and studio rental units are in great demand for our homeless Veterans, who desire to move into communities, such as Hillcrest and North Park—and so we are making another appeal to our private landlords, as we are grateful to the 290 who have already welcomed our ‘Housing Our Heroes’ veterans,” Gentry said.

Additional partners in the “Housing Our Heroes” campaign include the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, the California Apartment Association and the San Diego County Apartment Association. It calls for landlord outreach efforts, financial assistance and supportive services to get homeless veterans the help they need to turn their lives around.
Update, Dec. 27: City officials consider the “deadline” for getting 1,000 veterans off the street to be March of next year, a spokesman said. While the mayor announced the yearlong campaign in January, the funding for the program didn’t start until March of this year.

Original story:

Two weeks before the city’s goal for its “Housing Our Heroes” program, San Diego officials said 450 formerly homeless veterans now have homes and 254 others are apartment shopping with housing vouchers in hand.

When Mayor Kevin Faulconer announced the program in March, the advertised deadline was 1,000 veterans off the streets by the end of the year.

Speaking at a press conference Tuesday, Faulconer praised the work so far, asked for more participation and announced extra help.

“We’re making progress, but we still have more work to do. While many landlords have stepped up to take in homeless veterans, we’re asking for even more to open their doors this holiday season and make room for our struggling heroes,” the mayor said.

The Housing Our Heroes program devotes $4.4 million to landlord outreach, including providing a $500 incentive for the first apartment they rent and $250 for each additional unit.

The program also covers security deposits and $100 in one-time utility assistance per household. There’s also a contingency fund for damage to a unit.

City officials blamed the tight apartment rental market, in part, but also said the landlord outreach component of the campaign has found 141 units currently available for those still looking for a place.

The city wants to expand the Downtown San Diego Partnership’s family reunification program, which connects homeless people to family or friends who can provide housing stability for the short term.

City officials said they will search out a public-private partnership to fund the expansion.

The city also wants to increase use of the “homeless management information system,” which is a software program that attempts to coordinate care between service providers.

San Diego police will begin actively using the system to share data with providers on its contacts in the homeless population, city officials said.

As in the past, officials also said they will activate shelter beds for up to 275 homeless people when the weather turns very cold. The bulk of those beds will be at Father Joe’s Village, with some at Connections Housing.

In a new push, city officials said they are seeking other organizations to grow that network.
Downtown Homeless Population Rises Higher Than Ever Since 2012
Cassia Pollock | December 31, 2016


Newly released data shows the homeless population in downtown San Diego is the highest it has ever been since January 2012, according to a report from the Downtown San Diego Partnership.

The report indicates that in 2016 there were an average of 1,073 homeless people present in each neighborhood of downtown San Diego per a month, compared to an average of 582 homeless people for the year of 2012.

That data would suggest the average population size of homeless people living in downtown San Diego has nearly doubled in the past four years.

There were an average of 714 homeless people in downtown San Diego per month in 2015, 606 in 2014, 548 in 2013 and 582 in 2012, according to the Downtown San Diego Partnership.

Those numbers showed how many homeless people were present in the neighborhoods including East Village, Core, Columbia, Marina, Cortex and Gaslamp.

There was also an increase in the number of homeless people staying with the Connections Housing facility located on 6th Avenue and A Street. In 2016, an average of 128 homeless people took shelter there each month, compared to 91 in 2015, according to the report.

9 San Diego Events you don’t want to Miss This Week


December 12: Watch Tony Award–winning Broadway star (and San Diego native!) Brian Stokes Mitchell perform at Simply Broadway, a benefit concert supporting the La Jolla Playhouse and The Actors Fund, a national arts and entertainment organization.

December 14: The Downtown San Diego Partnership will Deck the Halls along B Street downtown, complete with music, food, drinks, and photo ops with Saint Nick himself.

December 15: "Let it glow" at Birch Aquarium's Holiday Night Lights event, featuring a Bioluminescence Room and encounters with creatures that glow in the dark.

December 16: Hop aboard the holiday train at the San Diego Model Railroad Museum’s Ales ‘n Rails Ugly Christmas Sweater Party.

December 17: Pay tribute to the legendary Gene Wilder with a special screening of Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, courtesy of Cinema @ The Balboa.

Celebrate the opening of Smarts Farm’s non-profit urban garden and learning center in East Village with a family-friendly Holiday Open House.
KUSI’s Brandi Williams joined Santa, the Downtown Partnership, and local artists for “Deck the Halls” – a festive winter celebration held in the heart of Downtown San Diego. The free event, complete with a life-sized snow globe, featured a holiday market, performances by San Diego musicians, and pictures with St. Nick.