



Alamo Today & Danville Today News

NOVEMBER 2023

“WINTER NIGHTS” SHELTERS FAMILIES TO NURTURE SUCCESS

By Jody Morgan

Winter Nights Family Shelter, Inc. (WN), now in its 20th season, is dedicated to keeping unhoused families together. The Shelter Program offers a wide range of support services to help clients emerge self-sufficient. Launched under the auspices of the Social Justice Alliance of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County, WN became an independent non-profit in 2020. The Safe Parking Program, initiated in 2018, now operates year-round, seven days a week, at two locations with a WN supervisor on duty throughout the night. The Continued Success Program, officially named in 2020, assists alumni as needed when a small financial set back threatens to turn into a major problem and reunites alumni to celebrate their achievements.

Executive Director Carmella Kowall explains, “If you use the program properly, you can thrive.” She adds, “The look on people’s faces when I tell them I was homeless is one of disbelief. But every member of the WN staff knows from personal experience that being homeless can happen to anyone.” All 12 WN staff members have experienced homelessness at some point. Five, including Carmella, have been WN clients. They understand the obstacles confronting clients.



Tents in use since season 7 give each WN family personal space.

One rainy winter, Gwen Watson, WN’s first Executive Director, and some friends realized there were women with children lacking shelter. They raised money to put them in a motel for two or three nights, but that was hardly enough. Without a structured organization, they learned, they could not get sufficient funding to open a shelter.

“I like to tell people Winter Nights Shelter is a beautiful combination of government and the public working together,” Watson says. “Writing a business plan was an important first step because officials wouldn’t take us seriously without it. I was a secondary school teacher. I didn’t have any experience writing a business plan.” Mark DeSaulnier, a Contra Costa County Supervisor at the time, recommended Larry Fisher, the husband of his chief of staff.

Gwen relates, “After Larry finished the business plan, he and I were talking about giving the shelter a name. He said, ‘Let’s not give it a stodgy name like

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A joyful reunion at the first Alumni Dinner in 2019 - Alumni mom (L) w/ volunteer Ogie Strogatz (R).

ADULT & CHILDREN BIKES WANTED!

Since 2002, Adopt a Family Bikes (AAFB) has refurbished and donated over 4,000 bikes to adults and youth in need. This year’s drive starts earlier than ever before in hopes of fulfilling many new requests from counselors in the San Ramon Valley Unified School District, in addition to clients of numerous Bay Area non-profit agencies serving our communities.

AAFB has a weekend drop-off space in the Alamo Plaza shopping center next door to Rite Aid. The address is 140 Alamo Plaza, Alamo. Do-

notations of bikes are welcome Saturdays and Sundays from 10^{AM}-5^{PM} through the new year with closures on Thanksgiving and Christmas weekends. Volunteers of any age are also



needed; just show up! Adults, unaccompanied minors 16 and older, and younger children with parents are all invited. The biggest task requires no experience! It involves just cleaning down and shining up the bikes.

All sizes of adult and youth bikes are needed. The group will make minor repairs and tune-up the bikes, and just ask that the bikes be free of rust and without bent frames.

Cash and donations are gratefully accepted and can be dropped off or mailed to St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church, (memo field “Adopt-A-Family Bikes”), 1550 Diablo Road, Danville, CA 94526. The money goes towards purchasing helmets, U-locks, and parts.

For updated information visit the “Adopt-A-Family Bikes” Facebook page, or www.adoptafamilybikes.org.

VETERANS PANCAKE BREAKFAST

Veterans, active duty members, and family are invited to join the Danville Town Council (Robert Storer, Karen Stepper, Newell Arnerich, Renee Morgan, and Dave Fong), along with American Legion Post 246 at the 8th annual complimentary pancake breakfast.



The breakfast will be held **Saturday, November 11th from 7:30^{AM}-10:30^{AM}** at the Veterans Memorial Building, 2nd floor, located at 400 Hartz Ave. in downtown Danville. Stop on by!

Thank you, Veterans.

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SAN RAMON VALLEY CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

By Jamie Westgate, Principal

This year, our students have been on a quest to “find treasure.” Every child loves the idea of hunting for gold, rubies, and diamonds, but at SRVCA we’ve been reminding them that God has an even greater treasure set aside for us if we seek it. Our theme verse for the year reminds us “He will be the sure foundation of your times, a rich store of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. The fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure” (Isaiah

33:6). Students are learning that the more time they spend in pursuit of God’s plan, the more they unlock the key to these important things.

Some of our kids are hearing about a war overseas, and have unlocked the key to a compassionate and empathetic heart for those suffering. As a result, students are praying for peace and protection for children on the other side of the globe. Others are learning that school is academically challenging, and they’re unlocking the treasure of perseverance. Grit is formed, and they’re realizing they are equipped to do hard things! Friendships are being established at school, and some are learning about God’s faithfulness to establish a treasured community. Since announcing this theme for the year, we’ve been noticing that God is present in the highs and the lows, and we’ve been grateful for His response.

Last week, one of our sixth grade students told his parent, “I can tell God is working at SRVCA.” He went on to share comments made to him by a local worker in downtown Danville who noticed a difference in the manners and friendliness of some of his peers. It’s always a joy to hear a compliment about our students, but my favorite part of the story was knowing the student attributed the difference to seeing God’s Spirit at work in them. To me, that was a treasure!

As we move into the holiday season, we will be seeking treasure in giving thanks for God Himself, and in knowing Jesus came to earth because He loves us so much. Our preschool and elementary students are working hard on their Christmas musical performances to share this good news, and we look forward to reporting about these special events next month. We wish those in our local community a restful and meaningful Thanksgiving holiday. May you all be aware of the visible and invisible treasures God has provided which are all around us.

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Interfaith Council Shelter. Let’s be creative, say something like Winter Nights.”

With the full support of the Orinda City Council, Police, and Fire Departments, volunteers were already preparing the vacant old Orinda library to receive the first women and children when an agitated group of misinformed protesters put a halt to their work. Unable to see beyond their stereotypical view of homeless people, they envisioned what the Eleven O’clock News portrayed in a split-screen image with the iconic Orinda Theater on one side of the screen, and homeless men sprawled out in San Francisco on the other. They thought desperate drug addicts and dangerous alcoholics were coming to Orinda instead of families trying to put their lives back together.

Eartha Newsong recalls the final meeting in the sanctuary of the Orinda Community Church that permanently vetoed use of the library location.

“Even some of the protesters’ own teenage children spoke in favor of the shelter. But the angry words of their ill-informed parents prevailed. When I walked out of the meeting, I found a large gathering of well-dressed men and women wearing buttons proclaiming: ‘We Wish We Had Said Yes.’”

Belief in their mission turned a bleak moment into a miracle. Enough area congregations agreed to each host for a week, which allowed WN to open for 24 weeks in 2004. Clients had sleeping pads and sleeping bags. They dressed for school or work each morning, taking turns in whatever bathroom facility was available. But the success of the venture was immediately apparent.

Winter Nights Office Manager Teri Lundvall describes her experience. “A small act of kindness is one of my fondest memories of entering the Winter Nights Shelter at Temple Isaiah on December 27th, 2004. My hands were rough from doing lots of cleaning and laundry. One of the staff members placed a container of hand lotion beside me and said a volunteer had donated it. It meant so much to me that she cared enough to notice my hands and offer a simple gesture of comfort.”

Bob Russell made getting parents to work and kids to school possible by volunteering his time and his truck. He also moved the families’ belongings each Monday on moving day. Ann Lawrence, now serving in many roles including Board Treasurer, recalls, “I first volunteered with WN in 2008 at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church mopping the shelter area after the clients had gone on to their daytime activities. There were no tents yet, so when I entered the quiet hall, what I saw were sleeping pads carefully lined up with children’s books and stuffed animals. The sight made me burst into tears.”

Judy Stillman, WN Executive Director from 2014-2021, organized the Traveling Tutors in 2008. She writes: “My church, Lafayette United Methodist, asked folks to volunteer at St. Anselm’s Episcopal Church, also in Lafayette. I was there on a Monday and the parents were setting up their sleeping places which were



MONTE VISTA HIGH SCHOOL

By Dr. Kevin Ahern, Principal

Monte Vista (MV) has finished up an incredible October and we are all looking forward to Thanksgiving Break and the lead up to the final weeks of our fall semester.

October kicked off with MV Choir’s annual Bach to School concert and the performance was nothing short of exemplary. Congratulations to MV’s Choir Director, Rosalind Neisinger, and our amazing choir students who performed two nights of incredible music in front of packed houses.

Recently, American Legion Post 246 honored several MV students at their annual Boys and Girls State Luncheon. MV’s Abigail Choi, Sanika Saleem, Ethan Chen, and Ethan Gulcu were all recognized for their participation in the program. It is great to see these student leaders representing our community.

MV Homecoming Week provided five days of awesome festivities and celebrations involving our students and our community. Months of planning culminated in a week of fantastic events that included a pre-game community tailgate party and MV’s Homecoming Game which included excellent halftime performances by our marching band and cheer /pom squads. While our football team came up short against a tough Cal High team, we shook off the loss the next evening with an equally spectacular Homecoming Dance where 1,500 MV students enjoyed and celebrated. I want to extend a huge thank you to students as well as MV Activities Director, Tommy Greenless and his leadership classes; Mr. Chris Connor and his Freshman Leadership students; MV Athletic Director, Andy Popper; Monte Vista’s Athletic Boosters; and all of our parent volunteers and organizations who contributed their time and energy to make this a truly outstanding community event.

At the end of October, members of MV’s Sophomore and Junior classes, as well as numerous teachers took part in our annual “Breaking Down the Walls” program. In this program, students spend one day out of the week connecting and/or re-connecting with one another, listening to their peers’ personal stories, and building a positive school culture. Over the years, this program has had a huge impact on our students. We are thankful to our community for their donations in support of this program.

Also at the end of October, MV’s Drama Program gave us their annual dose of frights as they opened their Haunted House. It is always a lot of fun and we look forward to this event every year. November 2-4, MV Drama is once again in focus as our students perform their fall play *Little Women*. Please visit mvhs.srvusd.net for tickets and more information.

MV Athletics have continued to roll through EBAL competition and into the NCS Playoffs. MV Women’s Golf claimed their third consecutive championship and are preparing for post season tournaments. MV Women’s Volleyball, MV Football, Men’s and Women’s Water Polo, Women’s Tennis, and Men’s and Women’s Cross Country are all also prepping for their regular season finales as they vie for their own EBAL crowns and plan to make deep NCS playoff runs. I am looking forward to sharing their successes with you in the future.

We invite everyone from the MV community to come out and support the Mustangs this fall.



Traveling tutor volunteer Louise Severy holds a client’s baby. (5 babies were born to mothers at the shelter during the 2018-2019 season.)

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HOMELESSNESS IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

By County Supervisor Candace Andersen

November is Homelessness Awareness Month. Contra Costa County faces many challenges related to homelessness, but has many programs and partners working to assist those in need. If you ever see someone who appears to be homeless, or you know of someone who is at risk, please call 211 or text "HOPE" to 20121.

Homeless services can also be accessed in person by walking into a Coordinated Assessment Resource and Engagement (CARE) Center. Currently there is one located in Richmond and one in Walnut Creek in the Trinity Center, 1888 Trinity Avenue.

Several factors contribute to homelessness in Contra Costa, including high housing costs, limited affordable housing options, unemployment, mental health issues, and substance abuse. Homelessness is a complex issue also influenced by the availability of social services.

During the 2023 Point-In-Time (PIT) count, 2,372 people were identified as experiencing homelessness in Contra Costa County. The PIT recorded 1,911 households experiencing unstable housing. This represents a 4% increase from 2020 to 2023. Of the 2,372 people experiencing homelessness, 70% (1,653) were unsheltered and 30% were sheltered. The majority of the unsheltered are male and 67% of people counted were chronically homeless. Veterans accounted for 4%.

While our annual PIT counts are important, they only reflect who we were able to find on January 25 of this year. We know that there are many more homeless individuals in Contra Costa County. A more accurate count is reflected by the services provided by the Contra Costa Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC). In 2022, the CoC served 7,725 households which included 10,600 individuals.

The CoC coordinates applications and submits a single grant application to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development annually to access federal resources to provide homeless services, housing, and supportive housing. These efforts bring in approximately \$15 million annually to support homeless housing and services. However, far more funds are expended.

The cost of housing is the biggest factor in the community's rate of homelessness. In Contra Costa County, workers need to earn \$43.73 per hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment. The County provides various services and resources to address homelessness, including shelters, outreach programs, and support for individuals struggling with homelessness. The services are often offered in collaboration with non-profit organizations.

The Council on Homelessness is the governing body for the Contra Costa CoC and advisory body to the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors. The Council follows federal and state regulations and is the planning body that coordinates the community's policies, strategies, and activities toward preventing and ending homelessness in Contra Costa County. It has diverse representation of various nonprofits, city and county government departments, consumers, faith leaders, law enforcement, and other interested parties.

Through the County's Health Department, the Health, Housing, and Homeless Services (H3) is committed to making homelessness short-lived and non-recurring. H3 has a variety of roles: Housing Developer, Funder, Service Provider, Service System Infrastructure, Policy and Advocacy, and Research and Evaluation. In 2022, over 7,700 households were served by H3. Of that number, 1,169 households accessed homelessness prevention services, 1,166 were served in permanent housing programs, and 96% of households-maintained housing in Permanent Supportive Housing. The County also provides Healthcare for the Homeless through the Health Department.

H3 has been working to provide improved capacity for the homeless and provide vouchers, permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and Crisis Response Services. Additionally, the County has 20 Coordinated Outreach Referral, Engagement (C.O.R.E.) teams. C.O.R.E. teams serve as an entry point into Contra Costa's system for unsheltered persons. They work to locate, engage, stabilize, and house chronically homeless individuals and families. The outreach teams identify individuals living on the streets, assess their housing and service needs, and facilitate connection to shelter and services.

The County also provides mobile clinics and street outreach. The mobile teams provide a variety of services including chronic disease management, addiction treatment, Narcan dispensing, wound care, ultrasounds, and testing for HIV, Hep C, syphilis, and other STI screening and treatment. There are also traditional shelter-based care options located at Delta Landing (Antioch); Brookside Shelter (San Pablo), and Concord and Respite Shelter (Concord).

How can you help? You can go to cchealth.org/h3 where there is a link to "Volunteer," and another link to a list of 17 of the Continuum of Care agencies working to help permanently house those who are homeless. If you don't have time available to assist these groups, a monetary donation would always be greatly appreciated.

My office is here to serve the residents of Contra Costa County District 2, which includes San Ramon, Danville, Alamo, Diablo, Blackhawk, Walnut Creek, Saranap, Parkmead, Lafayette, Moraga, Canyon, and Orinda. Please contact us if we can provide you with additional information on this topic or on other County issues. I can be reached at SupervisorAndersen@bos.cccounty.us or 925-655-2300.

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sheets hanging over PVC pipes (tents came later) and the kids were a bit wild having no supervision. My teacher instincts took over and I corralled them as best I could." Jo Kerner, who played tennis with Judy that week, agreed to volunteer with her helping the kids with homework and reading.

Kerner notes: "Gwen insisted on a place away from the chaos of pre-dinner activity for tutoring. We'd arrive about the same time the families did at the sheltering congregation, find out where the tutoring room was." Jo continues, "The reading program was fine-tuned to include a chart with each child's progress and awards for completing hours of reading each week."

Peggy Woehleke currently coordinates Traveling Tutors. Many churches now provide experienced tutors, so the Traveling Tutor's role is introducing the children each night and explaining their specific needs. Peggy relates one of their many success stories. Last season a church tutor realized an 8th grader who always did her homework at school was probably embarrassed to read with volunteers because she had difficulty reading. Tutors introduced her to graphic novels and enlisted her mother's aid in working with the school. At the end of the season, the student was able to graduate with her class.

Jim Pfohl joined WN as a Traveling Tutor and added helping clients polish their resumes and identify job opportunities to his contributions. During the shelter's 7th season, Pfohl suggested tents would give families more privacy. Now each family enjoys its own tented space within the shelter.

More than 60 faith communities participate. Other charitable groups also take turns making dinners and entertaining the children. Maria Schopp coordinates volunteers from BSA Troop 200 Lafayette. Scouts have had fun playing balloon volleyball with the kids. She remarks that helping at the shelter gives the boys a sense that everyone could use a hand now and then.

Erica Bradley-Pacheco brings the Acalanes Girls Soccer team to volunteer again in December. Her 16-year-old daughter Stella Pacheco writes: "In my past visits, I enjoyed cooking meals. But what I enjoyed more was sitting and talking to the people who I was cooking for. I got to learn about stories and people beyond just their situation that brought them to the organization. Winter Nights has helped me establish my love for volunteering and introduce me to the fun and heartfelt moments with the people of the program."

WN still encounters the erroneous belief that all homeless people are a blight on society. "A neighbor living near Walnut Creek Friends Church was



Judy Stillman and Bill Shaw together at a 2019 Staff appreciation breakfast. (Judy was Executive Director and Bill was Program Director).

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DON'T DELAY YOUR TRAVEL!

By Mike Mullery, Alamo World Travel & Tours

"The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page." ~ Saint Augustine. Our goal is to read the whole book.

In 42 years of professional travel consultation, no one at Alamo World Travel ever had a client say, "I started traveling too soon." In the past five years my wife, Ilene, and I have been to six of the seven continents: Antarctica, Africa, South America,

Europe, Australia, and of course North America. Our visit to **Asia** was over five years ago.

Our most recent adventure was to **Africa** where we took a safari and saw the "Big 5" - lions, leopards, elephants, rhinoceros, and Cape buffalo along with giraffes, zebras, hippos, cheetahs, crocodiles and many others. It was a fantastic trip to Kenya, and we plan to go back, perhaps to South Africa next.

An earlier journey was a frosty expedition to **Antarctica**, the southernmost continent on Earth. The vast, untouched landscapes and breathtaking ice formations make it a unique destination for the adventurous traveler, especially on a true icebreaker like our Lindblad/National Geographic ship.

There was great scenery, lectures, and awesome photography opportunities. Imagine cruising through icy waters, boarding a Zodiac boat, spotting penguins, seals, whales, and 10-foot Albatross, and feeling the chill of the world's coldest place. Our ship was the first of the year to cross the Antarctic Circle. Antarctica and Africa have been our two most memorable trips.

Another great trip was to **South America** on a Regent Cruise with famed restaurateur and radio personality, Narsai David. South America is a continent filled with captivating contrasts. There is the Amazon rain-forest, Inca ruins of Machu Picchu, Iguazu Falls, beaches, deserts, lakes, the awesome and diverse Galapagos, and the beauty of Rio. South America is a treasure trove of natural wonders and ancient history. Relaxation or adventure, it has it all.

Europe, a continent steeped in history, scenery, and culture is our most visited continent. There is so much to see that we have taken multiple ocean cruises with Regent, Oceania, and others around the area. We also really enjoyed river cruising the continent on AmaWaterways and Uniworld, along with taking Insight escorted tours, and staying in Signature Hotels. One can explore the romantic streets of Paris, the ancient wonders of Rome, the Norwegian fjords, the fairy-tale landscapes of the Scottish Highlands, and crossing the Arctic Circle as we did on a Windstar Circle Iceland cruise. Europe offers a rich tapestry of experiences for every traveler. Pick the area you are most interested in, then go back for additional experiences.

Pre-covid, we cruised the "Land Down Under," **Australia**. With its iconic Sydney Opera House, the mystical Uluru (Ayers Rock), and the Great Barrier Reef, Australia offers a diverse range of experiences, from urban adventures to natural wonders. The wildlife is truly unique with kangaroos, dingos, wallabies, wombats, koala, and platypus. We also visited New Zealand, another wondrous and beautiful country. It was a great time, and well worth the long flight.

Our next experiences include an AmaWaterways Nile River Cruise and a Regent British Isles Cruise in September, once again with Narsai David. You can join us.

Our travel book is getting filled, let us help you fill yours.

Alamo World Travel & Tours has specialized in luxury travel for 42 years. We are located at 3201 Danville Blvd, Suite 255, in Alamo. We can be reached at 925-837-8742 or via email at info@alamoworld.com. Advertorial



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vehemently opposed to having the church shelter homeless people even for two weeks," explains Rich Wallace, WN volunteer coordinator for the church. "I asked him to come to visit us while we were hosting the shelter. Once he met the families, his stereotypical image of homeless people was completely altered. Now he's an ardent supporter of our mission, providing money for meals."

Lundvall loves connecting with clients. "Every year there is a family that gets under your skin and melts your heart. One shy little girl stood behind her mother when she arrived. By the time she left she was filled with warmth and hugged all of us."

The Safe Parking Program (SPP) invites clients living in their cars to join shelter residents at the Oasis Day Center which provides showers, restrooms, computers to research employment opportunities, and case management services. Blankets and sleeping bags top the SPP wish list because vehicle heaters don't run at night.

Bill Shaw, third WN Executive Director, instrumental in starting SPP, launched Continuing Success with Teri Lundvall following the first Alumni Reunion Dinner in October 2019. Between gatherings, Continued Success offers financial assistance to prevent unexpected expenditures from derailing alumni on track to stay stably housed and self-sufficient. This December, a second Holiday Alumni Party is planned. As at the first held in 2021, children will pick out gifts as their names are drawn. The table of new socks was exceptionally popular.

In the September 2023 "Good News Letter," Ann Lawrence writes: "Records are a bit murky from the earliest years of Winter Nights, and numbers don't always tell the full story of lives changed, but here is a sense of Winter Nights Family Shelter ... by the numbers." During the first 19 seasons 422 families with about 830 children were sheltered. At least 56% of families were stably housed.

More information is found on the WN website including most-needed supplies, favorite gifts for the holidays, how to volunteer or make a financial donation, and requirements to become a WN client. Visit

cccwinternights.org.

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SRV also hosted their first ever cultural fair. Many different groups of students had booths highlighting their culture and heritage. Students enjoyed visiting booths, learning about different cultures, and trying new food.

Choir students had their first choir concert of the school year showcasing their beautiful voices and all the hard work they have been putting in.

Looking into November, students are focusing on their academics before being released for Thanksgiving break the week of November 20th. The annual Fall Dance show will be held mid-November, and we are excited to see all our talented dancers perform. The Special Olympics will be hosted at SRV in early November. Our students, staff and community

are looking forward to cheering on our competitors. To place an ad, share a story, or find more information about our paper, contact us at 925.405.6397 or editor@yourmonthypaper.com.