

SEEN AROUND TOWN

by Lynda Millner

New Beginnings



New Beginnings donor Anne Towbes, board member Guy Smith, and event planner Judi Weisbart



New Beginnings president Diane Pannkuk, board member Jeff Moody, and executive director Kristine J. Schwarz at the reception

Everyone Deserves a New Beginning...

New Beginnings Counseling Center held its annual fundraiser in a new way with an evening of theatre at the New Vic. It was a stage reading production with award winning professional actors including a wonderful nine-year-old girl, Hope Dekkers, and Stephanie Edwards, who co-hosted the Tournament of Roses Parade with Bob Eubanks for 35 years. The play

Food and Shelter was written by Emmy award winner Jane Anderson and directed by Jenny Sullivan. Did you ever wonder what it would be like to go to Disneyland if you were homeless? That is the play's theme.

Jane wrote it in 1992 thinking that the homeless situation would improve. It seems to have only gotten worse. As New Beginnings executive director Kristine Schwarz said, "This isn't a depressing preachy lecture



Ms Millner is the author of *The Magic Makeover, Tricks for Looking Thinner, Younger and More Confident - Instantly*. If you have an event that belongs in this column, you are invited to call Lynda at 969-6164.

about what people need to be doing." She believes people relate to others through shared history, belief, experience and understanding.

After the two-act play, fundraiser guests had a reception in the courtyard. This whole event was arranged by coordinator Judi Weisbart and development manager Michael Berton. Diane Pannkuk heads up the board of directors.

New Beginnings was established in 1968 to provide psychological counseling and supportive services to homeless, veterans, and low income families. In 2018 they served an amazing 1,733 people in Santa Barbara.

One of New Beginnings' popular programs is the safe parking at night for folks living in their cars. What surprised me is that 40% of those who live in their cars have full-time employment and 95% are locals as opposed to someone just driving through town. It has been operating since 2004 cooperating with churches, governmental and non-profit agencies as well as businesses. They connect

the chronically homeless to shelters and services that will get them off the streets and into safer environments. They also distribute more than 450 pounds of food each month and offer a rapid re-housing component that helps them transition into permanent housing and employment. New Beginnings offers job tutoring and resumé preparation. Life changing assistance is offered.

Other services are a life skills parenting education program and more. Their motto: "Changing Lives One Person at a Time." Contact them at 805.963.7777.

Ghost Light Night

This event wasn't about Halloween. According to the invitation the ghost light is a "luminescence in the pitch of night in theaters across the globe. The haunting bulb stands bare-bones and aglow, defying the inky darkness and beckoning spirits to come hither and play." This was a party orchestrated by the Ensemble Theatre Company (ETC) and the ghost light presides over the New Vic Theatre.

I loved the invitation which specified "Theatrical attire admired, not required!" And so it was, with guests showing up in all sorts of attire at the Santa Barbara Club on the grassy lawn outside. The tables were decorated

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by Zach Rosen

New Beginnings Counseling Center

All too often the amount of people living on the street in the area is referred to as the "homeless problem." While there is a negative connotation to the word *problem*, problems also have solutions and New Beginnings Counseling Center (NBCC) is one of the nonprofits in town working to provide solutions. Their range of programs approach the problem with solutions that bridge temporary fixes and long-term stability for those in need.

It is important to have accurate metrics and quantifications to understand the breadth and depth of a social issue like homelessness. Every other year NBCC participates in the Point-in-Time Count that incorporates almost 500 volunteers canvassing the county on census tract map routes over a three-hour period to properly quantify to define the current state of homelessness in the Santa Barbara County. This year they recorded 1,803 homeless individuals in the county; compared to 1860 individuals in 2017. While the total homeless population went down, there was a 27% increase in

unsheltered homelessness. The count also recorded the sleeping location of individuals with 37% sleeping under shelter, 36% on the streets, and 27% in their vehicles. It is important to note that 76% of those interviewed reported living in Santa Barbara County when they first became homeless with 60% of the homeless having lived in the county for 11 years or more. While the program does its best to count everyone, these are also considered low estimates because they are based purely on only those they could find.

With a significant amount of homeless living in their vehicles, this form is often referred to as the "invisible homelessness." Many of them are still working jobs and lost their homes due to circumstances out of their control like an unexpected medical bill or a sudden rent increase. In 2004, NBCC launched the Safe Parking Program that provides safe, confidential parking spaces to those living out of their vehicles. Today the program manages 134 spaces in 24 different parking lots spread between Goleta, Santa Barbara, and other unincorporated areas of



the county. In addition to offering a parking space, participants are connected with support services like food and counseling that can include job tutoring and resumé preparation. The program has seen widespread success and in the 15 years that the program has been around, they have not had any major incidents of damages. Since launching the Safe Parking Program, it has received national praise and the program has been adopted by other cities. NBCC even created a three-day training program and manual that helps other cities and organizations launch their own version of it.

The Safe Parking Program has an additional rapid rehousing component where the NBCC works to get these individuals and families out of their cars and into housing as soon as possible. This is an important piece to the NBCC programs. Housing offers stability. They have found better long-term success by getting individuals and families settled in a home first, and then offering the proper support. This is seen with their Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. Security and utility deposits can be one of the many hurdles that a veteran may have for finding a home. By partnering with landlords and even offering temporary financial assistance, NBCC helps veterans and

their families both obtain and maintain housing. They then also assist with short-term case management, counseling, and assistance with VA benefit applications. The SSVF helps provide solutions that will result in long term stability for veterans and their families.

NBCC began as a counseling center in 2001 and that continues today. Their Donald J. Willfong Community Counseling Clinic helps more than 600 at-risk individuals and families each year by providing one-on-one counseling to those in need around the area. Counseling is provided by masters and doctoral-level interns who are working on hours for their clinical license and is offered on a sliding scale. Their Life Skills Parenting and Education Program assists over 100 low-income families each year with practical tools that help form a stable home. These programs are in bilingual formats that offer support for both English and Spanish. There are also additional specialized programs that offer services for groups like coping veterans, single expectant mothers, and sex trafficking survivors. Collectively these programs help over 300 people each week.

More information about NBCC's different programs is available at snbcc.org.

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