

March 2015

Birthstone: Aquamarine
Flower: Daffodil

Pathfinder



CITY OF SANTA MARIA EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER



Word has it ...

From your City Manager

Rick Haydon



March brings us St. Patrick's Day (March 17th), replete with imagery of a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow of luck. While a time for celebrating, in many communities including Santa Maria, scores of people are trying to find that rainbow and some spare change.

We know that the number of people on the streets who are homeless, or claim to be, has increased in the past year. Additionally, reports from Santa Maria's homeless shelters state that they are pretty much full almost all of the time.

A new effort to reduce aggressive panhandling in Santa Maria is underway. Designated parking meters – converted to accept donations for services for the homeless – are now installed at four locations where panhandling is most prevalent. These are the drive-through lane of the McDonald's restaurant at Broadway and Fesler, at the J.C. Penny's shopping center near the FoodsCo and by Starbucks, as well as between BevMo and Trader Joe's. The City is evaluating where to place four more.

The pilot program is a partnership among the City, the Good Samaritan Shelter in Santa Maria, Central Coast Rescue Mission, and the Salvation Army of Santa Maria. Money collected from the meters are used by those three non-profit organizations, to provide bedding, food-related services, and treatment programs.

"The program is a success because it is educating lots of people about redirecting money to those agencies that provide services directly to the homeless, rather than through handouts to panhandlers," says Sylvia

Barnard, Good Sam's Executive Director. Good Sam posted to its Facebook page the City's video about the donation meters and within four days, she said, "5,000 people had viewed the video." That's great! That video is also on the City of Santa Maria website. Additionally, Sylvia mentioned the meter program to Lompoc officials, who are now interested.

Directly donating to the "donation stations" helps reduce the odds that a chronic panhandler will be able to perpetuate his/her condition and/or addictions, strain local resources and detract from the quality of life in Santa Maria.

Those cardboard signs – you know the type "homeless" and "please give" – don't tell the whole story. Did you know that not all local panhandlers are actually homeless, rather some are actually supplementing their incomes through panhandling on City streets?

Did you also know that some panhandlers don't actually even live in this community but come here from nearby smaller cities to panhandle, or by giving money directly to these panhandlers that you might even be supporting an addiction?

Making a donation by way of one of the donation meters or to some of the above service organizations that support the homeless actually provides an opportunity to help those less fortunate. Donating this way is fast, convenient and private, and our program tells residents and visitors that the community is actively looking for solutions to help the homeless.

Anyone interested in making donations also may leave their contact information on a voice mail at the City at 925-0951 ext. 800.

Rick