

CONFERENCE IN APTOS

# Summit aims to end homelessness in county

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APTOS — Many community leaders believe there is a way to end homelessness.

Approximately 250 people gathered on Saturday for a day-long workshop in the Cabrillo College cafeteria to begin carving a path that could even-

tually solve the problem of homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

Many experts say it'll take a somewhat Herculean effort to dramatically reduce the number of homeless throughout the county, which stands at nearly 2,800, according to officials with the Santa Cruz chapter of the

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Monica Martinez presents on the issue of homelessness and methods for dealing with the issue in Santa Cruz County at the Smart Solutions to Homelessness Conference at Cabrillo College Saturday.

## HOMELESS

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United Way.

By comparison, Monterey County has 2,700 homeless, United Way's Executive Director Mary Lou Goeke said.

"We need to understand what is the situation in our county, and share that information," Goeke said.

Besides Goeke, Saturday's event brought several community leaders from around the county, including Santa Cruz Mayor Don Lane, Monica Martinez of the Santa Cruz Homeless Services Center, Gary Merrill, former executive director of the Santa Cruz County Business Council and Margarita Cortez, head of Pajaro Valley Loaves and Fishes.

Law enforcement officers, church representatives, service providers and homeless people also attended the summit called Smart Solutions to Homelessness.

"Everybody has to be in the conversation for us to get anywhere," Lane said. "We need to shift to a best practiced, evidence-based approach. We can't just throw resources



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Monica Martinez describes methods of dealing with the issue of homelessness in Santa Cruz County during the Smart Solutions to Homelessness Conference at Cabrillo College on Saturday.

at the problem."

Martinez, who leads the county's main homeless services organization, said it's not impossible to end homelessness.

Providing shelters, meals, health care and other services only treats the symptom of homelessness, Martinez said.

She described permanent supportive housing as a key step to keeping people from living on the streets.

Permanent supportive housing doesn't mean building a new shelter, she said. Rather, it means bundling resources and assistance programs to allow home-

less people to "access and sustain" housing in a way they could never do on their own.

"Every dollar we spend, every action we take, every decision we make needs to achieve the result we want," Martinez said. "These are the most vulnerable people in our community."

Martinez cited examples of new, cutting-edge programs in larger cities such as Chicago, Portland, Boston, Tulsa, Okla., and San Francisco that have successfully reduced the number of homeless.

Goeke painted a clear picture of the homeless situa-

tion in Santa Cruz County with data from an annual census and survey.

Of the 2,771 homeless people in the county, 17 percent are families with children and 64 percent have a high school diploma or GED, she said.

About 18 percent of the county's homeless suffer from a mental illness and 26 percent have a physical disability.

Seven percent have served time in jail or prison, and nearly 70 percent lived in Santa Cruz County before losing their home.

"It's a community effort to deal with it," said Michael Curry, a Cabrillo student who was homeless for a few years starting in 2007. "The causes to be in that situation are so broad. It's good to have a community dialogue amongst ourselves."

Lane said a volunteer leadership council would be formed at the conclusion of Saturday's workshop to carry on the ideas generated at the workshop.

"Reducing and ending homelessness, that's the vision," he said.

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