Peer Recovery Art Project: Collaborating for a Healthier Community

An interview by Tom Portwood

Community-based organizations are constantly seeking innovative ways to make a difference in the lives of the clients they serve and for the people in the towns, cities, and neighborhoods where those agencies are located. Peer Recovery Art Project, Inc., has definitely employed a highly innovative approach in its mission to not only end the stigma of mental illness, but to revitalize downtown areas while building toward a healthier, all-inclusive community.

“Peer Recovery Art Project started as a project amongst mental health clients, and one of the things we recognized early on was that there was no involvement for those of us who had mental health challenges,” founder and CEO John Black recently said of the agency’s beginnings. “There was no way to connect with each other except through a clinic or a center.”

“Before Peer Recovery Art Project was started there was no place where people could go to celebrate their gifts rather than their diagnosis,” Mr. Black continued. “So it was born out of necessity. I’m involved in this project because I was drafted – I had a mental health issue myself, and one of the ways I got better was to do things for the community. I’ve been in treatment and therapy, but there still has to be more than that. There has to be peer support, mutual aid - ways to connect people from treatment back into their natural communities. But it always seemed to run short of that. In nature, if you have a pool, and you stop water from going into the pool, it will get stagnant and the fish will die. The same metaphor applies to people – if you have a program that treats people to get better, but once they get better they have no way to connect or grow as individuals, or go into business, or get loans, then where do they go? They circle around and go back into treatment or the hospital. It’s hard for people to get connected once they’ve been disconnected.”

Mr. Black points with pride at the evolving nature of the agency. “We began as a street team, helping to produce fairs and festivals, and then in 2009, we won an Elli Lilly grant award for Innovation in Community Development, so we formed a nonprofit, and for a time were located in a building at the corner of J and 13th in downtown Modesto. That grant was highly successful - we showcased artwork in that space, held poetry events. And we started the first Day of the Dead event, provided the venue for the Cambodian New Year celebration, and several rock music festivals. We did lots of good things, and always connected to the community and our partners. One of our partners, Project Yes, is still located at that site.”

Currently, Peer Recovery Art Project’s small part-time staff and corps of volunteers find themselves returning to many of the activities they first worked on in the community years ago. “We’re going back to our roots,” reflected Mr. Black. “We believe in the art of living – to sustain your health, your wealth, and your vitality as long as you can.” Toward that goal, Peer Recovery Art Project currently offers an eclectic set of services, including consulting and partnering with other nonprofit community agencies; serving as event planners and promoters; and providing health coach services to those with mental health issues.

“Artwork is displayed everywhere we go, and we’re beginning to do concerts and performances that reach our audience and put us at the forefront of events.”

The Modesto Peace/Life Center invites you to

A Harvest Gathering
Fundraiser for the Peace Essay Contest

Friday, November 1, 2019 / 5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
at the home of John Frailing & Maria Arevalo
1125 Edgebrook Dr., Modesto

Enjoy:
Delicious Hors d’oeuvres | Good Wines | Special Coffees & Teas

Suggested Donation: $20 per person
Casual attire

Golden State Road Warriors Wheelchair Basketball Team returns to Modesto!

Join the Modesto Peace/Life Center as the professional Golden State Road Warriors Wheelchair Basketball Team returns to Modesto to fundraise for KCBP 95.5 FM, your community radio station, at Enoch’s High School Gym, 3201 Sylvan Ave., Modesto on Saturday, October 26 at 3:00 p.m.
This exciting, fun game features the Golden State Warriors playing against participating audience members and a VIP guest! There will be a silent and live auction, raffle, entertainment and much more.

TICKETS: $20 per person: $10/ Students, Seniors and Disabled at kcbpradio.org
For more information, contact Jocelyn Cooper (209) 232-5845.
Holiday gift bags for Women’s Prison

By DAVID HETLAND

The Central California Women’s Facility in Chowchilla is the largest female prison in the United States with nearly 2800 inmates, including the only State of California death row.

The Inmate Family Council, an officially sanctioned group of volunteers advocates on behalf of their loved ones and distributes gift bags to the more than 2700 inmates during the winter holiday season. This requires an ongoing, year-round effort on the part of many local caring individuals and organizations to gather appropriate items.

You can help by collecting travel/sample sizes of the following: soap, shampoo, conditioner, skin/body lotion, toothpaste and tissue. There’s also a need for adult size toothbrushes (individually wrapped), full size wood pencils with erasers, and unused greeting cards with envelopes.

Donated items may be brought to the Peace/Life Center Office, 720 13th St., Modesto (call ahead to make sure the Office is open). For more information, contact Shelly, shellys833@aol.com, (209-521-6304) or Dave (209-388-1608).

Dia de Los Muertos Celebration

Dia de Los Muertos is celebrating its 4th annual celebration on Saturday, October 19, 2019. This celebration is possible through the generous donations from the community and individuals. Dia de Los Muertos is 100% free to the community and provides many activities for children, Ballet Folklorico, musical entertainment and more.

To donate to the event, send your donation to AGIF, 1220 I St., Modesto, CA 95354. The community and American GI Forum thanks you for your continued support.

CCJ Needs Your Voice

The Council of Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health (CCJBH) is conducting community engagement activities in locations throughout the state to elicit information from individuals with Lived Experience in the intersection of the criminal justice and behavioral health systems.

The goal is to gather input related to personal experiences, current needs, and best practices of programs and policies that work in this intersection. CCJBH is seeking participation from diverse populations including consumers, family members, and professionals to provide their first-hand perspectives.

This community engagement event will provide the information necessary to develop a funding opportunity for organizations to apply that can help reduce the incarceration of individuals with behavioral health challenges.

Who Should Attend?

• Individuals with Lived Experience in the Intersection of Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health
• Family and Consumer Groups
• Regional Reentry Partnership Members
• Government and Nonprofit Partners working to Improve Social, Health and Public Safety Outcomes
• Mental Health, Substance Use, and Community Correctional Providers
• Groups Working to Reduce Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Disparities
• Organizations of Individuals who are or have been Justice-Involved
• Justice Providers/Officers of the Court

Registration link: Fresno, 10/22/19 9:00am–12:00pm
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ccjbh-needs-your-voice-fresno-tickets-71212046147
Questions? Contact catherine.hickinbotham@cdcr.ca.gov

Health Well’s Cancer-Related Behavioral Health Fund

Submitted by JOHN AGUIRRE

Health Well’s Cancer-Related Behavioral Health Fund assists individuals in need of cancer-related behavioral health treatments by providing financial assistance to individuals with a diagnosis of cancer to help with cost-shares for covered services prescribed by behavioral health providers (psychiatrists, psychologists and licensed social workers).

Visit https://www.healthwellfoundation.org/fund/cancer-related-behavioral-health/

NOTICE

There will not be a November issue of Connections

IN MEMORIAM

Nancy Formella
Former Spanish teacher, Long-time Modesto Peace/Life Center Activist, Member of Occupy, Vigil Planner

Daniel F. Pollock
April 16, 1939 – August 12, 2019
(See remembrance by Dan Onorato)

Peace/Life Center looking for volunteers

The Modesto Peace/Life Center needs volunteers to assist with projects, events, our radio project (radio knowledge, skills needed), fundraising, and administrative activities. No experience necessary. Experience in social media, Word, Excel, or other special skills are desired for some volunteer positions. We need volunteers for a few hours per week, or an ongoing commitment.

For more information, contact our volunteer/outreach coordinators: Susan Bower or Jocelyn Cooper at the Peace Life Center (209) 529-5750.
Dan Pollock: April 16, 1939—August 12, 2019

By DAN ONORATO

Daniel Pollock, an active and much-loved member of the Modesto Peace/Life Center community who had lived, with his family, for 13 years in Modesto, died on August 12 at his home in Dixon, New Mexico, of complications due to Parkinson’s Disease.

With Cliff Humphrey of Ecology Action and Sam Tyson of the Center, Dan co-founded Stanislaus Safe Energy in 1973 to oppose the construction of a nuclear power plant PG&E was considering in the eastern part of our county. He helped lead the Center’s effort to promote energy conservation and clean, sustainable alternatives to the nuclear option. The Energy Research Group led by Bill Wilson remodeled a portion of Dan’s home to build the county’s first passive solar green house.

When headlines began to cover the Khmer Rouge’s genocide against their fellow Cambodians in 1975, Dan initiated a letter writing campaign to The Modesto Bee to urge more in-depth reporting and explain how people might help.

He was also active in supporting the long struggle of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta’s grape strike to help the United Farm Workers create a successful workers’ union.

Dan was widely known and appreciated as a teacher of organic gardening. He taught many of us how to compost and use alternatives to insecticides. But with his contagious love of nature and the land, Dan also inspired a practical love of the soil and an appreciation of our earth and our environment.

At the core of Dan’s person was a gentle kindness, a generous caring, a warm, welcoming, inquisitive spirit, and an endearing laughter and enthusiasm. Dan was a loving husband, father, grandfather, and relative. And for those of us who were fortunate to know him well, he was a true friend.

We’re holding a special memorial to celebrate Dan’s life and legacy on Saturday, October 5, at 3:00 p.m., followed by a potluck feast. The memorial will take place at the home of Alice and Dan Onorato, 1532 Vernon Ave., Modesto. Dan’s wife Barbara and some of his children will be with us. We’ll share stories and reflections, play music Dan really liked, and enjoy a lively potluck meal together. Those who plan to attend the gathering are asked to bring a favorite dish and a beverage to share. Also, those who would like to can donate in Dan’s memory to the Modesto Peace/Life Center, P.O. Box 134, Modesto, CA 95353.

Be informed!

Read the Valley Citizen at http://thevalleycitizen.com

2020 Peace Essay Contest
Heroes of Peace

“It isn’t enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn’t enough to believe in it. One must work at it.”
Eleanor Roosevelt

Peace is understood to mean not only an absence of hostilities or war, but also a state of harmony and justice existing between people, groups or nations. All over the globe and throughout history, there have been people who have steadily worked for peace and justice through non-violent and non-military means. They have worked alone and sometimes joined with others, often working behind the scenes. These people are the rarely recognized heroes of peace.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi or Mother Teresa are examples of well known peacemakers. However, there are many people whose peacemaking efforts are not widely recognized. The experiences of these unheralded peacemakers are sometimes told in songs and stories, but seldom make the history books.

The 2020 Peace Essay Contest challenges you to find and bring recognition to one of these lesser-known heroes of peace. You may find them in your family or neighborhood, in your community or nation, or in places all over the globe. They may have lived in the past or might be living today. They may have used ideas, words, pens, music, shovels, diplomacy, technology or a variety of other common or unusual tools to build peace between people, groups or nations. The focus of each person’s work may differ, but common to all peacemakers is a commitment to using non-violent principles and actions to nurture and encourage positive relationships among people resulting in a more peaceful world, locally and beyond.

Division I (grades 11-12) and Division II (grades 9 - 10) 500-1000 Words
Division III (grades 7-8) and Division IV (grades 5-6) 250-500 Words

By talking with others and/or researching, find and write, in your own words, about a lesser known person who has worked for peace and justice through non-violent and non-military means. This person may have lived in the past or is living today. He or she may be from your local community or from anywhere around the globe, working to make our world a more fair and peaceful place.

In your essay:
- Describe who the person is/was and how he/she has worked for peace and justice.
- Explain why this person’s actions are an important contribution to building a more peaceful and just world.
- Tell how the work of this person might inspire you to also find ways to work for a more peaceful and just world.

Print your word count at the end of the text of your essay. Then show Works Cited for any quotations, borrowed ideas and facts that are not general knowledge. (The title and citations are not included in the word count.) If you are uncertain about plagiarism, ask your teacher. Further suggestions on using citations are included in the submission details and at http://peaceessaycontest.weebly.com/. See complete rules on backside of this flyer.

Deadline for Entries: November 22, 2019 Notification of Winners: Late February, 2020

AWARDS 1st Place 2nd Place 3rd Place Honorable Mention
Division I and II $300 $200 $100 $50
Division III and IV $150 $100 $50 $25

View, download/print the flyers and entry form at http://peaceessaycontest.weebly.com/ or www.stanislausconnections.org
Peace Essay Contest 2020  Rules & Submission Directions

1. The Peace Essay Contest is open to all fifth through twelfth grade students who live in Stanislaus County or attend any public, private, or home school in Stanislaus County.

2. Submit one copy of your essay. Essays in Division I & II must be typewritten, double spaced. Essays in Divisions III & IV must be either typewritten or written in dark ink, double spaced, using one side of white paper 8 1/2 x 11 inches. Number the pages consecutively. Your essay must be of a quality to photocopy legibly. Your name/identifying information should not be anywhere on or in the essay.

3. Give your essay a title. Place it on the first page where you begin your essay. Do not use a separate title or cover page.

4. IMPORTANT: Place the word count at the end of your essay. Essays that are 25 words more than the directed word count will not be considered for judging.

5. Print & complete the Entry Form and staple to the front of your essay. Forms may be found at:
   http://peaceessaycontest.weebly.com OR www.stanislausconnections.org OR peaceessay20@gmail.com.

6. Refer to your source for any quotations, borrowed ideas, and facts that are not general knowledge by placing the name of the source in parentheses in the text of your essay, AND by creating a bibliography listing the authors of books, location of articles or addresses of websites you used to get your information. Do not base your entire essay on one source. Suggestions about how to choose reliable internet sources and correctly cite them are included in the weebly essay web site mentioned above.

7. You must do your own work. However, you may ask a teacher, parent, or friend for constructive criticism.

8. The Modesto Peace/Life Center reserves the right to reprint entries. Entries will not be returned.

9. Entries may be delivered to the Modesto Peace/Life Center, 720 13th St., Modesto, from 2pm-5pm on November 20 - 21 - 22, 2019. You may also mail all entries, postmarked no later than November 22, 2019 to:
   2019 Peace Essay Contest
   Modesto Peace/Life Center
   P.O. Box 134
   Modesto, CA 95353-0134

JUDGING

IMPORTANT: Essays that are 25 words over the directed word count will not be considered for judging.

A distinguished group of local writers, educators, and peacemakers will judge the essays. Judging guidelines (in order of weight) include:

1. Content
   A. Does the essay clearly address the assigned topic?
   B. Does the essay show that the student researched their category and/or specific area of concern?
   C. Has the writer used relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples to fully develop their ideas?

2. Style
   A. Is the essay original and interesting?
   B. Does the voice of the writer come through?

3. Clarity of Expression
   A. Does the essay have a distinguishable introduction and conclusion? Is it well organized with clear transitions from one idea to the next?
   B. Are the ideas clearly stated with factual support?

4. Mechanics
   A. Has the writer attempted to use appropriate transitions, precise language, and an engaging style?
   B. Are grammar, spelling, and punctuation reasonably correct?
   C. Does the author cite all quotations, borrowed ideas, and facts that are not general knowledge? Is the source of information listed in the essay itself and in a bibliography at the end of the essay?

First, Second, and Third prizes will be awarded in each of the four divisions which have at least 15 entries. In the event that there are fewer than 15 entries in any one division, all prizes may or may not be awarded in that division at the discretion of the judging panel. Up to 3 Honorable Mentions may be awarded in each division. Group entries (more than one author) are welcome; however, a student may only enter one essay.

The writer of the best essay in a division from a school which has ten or more entries in that division will be honored as the school winner. All participants will receive a Certificate of Participation.

Notification of Winners
In February, 2020, winners will be notified through the student's teacher. Prizes will be presented at an Awards Reception on April 3, 2020. All participants, teachers, judges, and sponsors will be invited as guests of honor.

2020 Peace Essay Committee:
Indira Clark, Peggy Hoover, Linda Lagace, Colleen Norby, Deborah Roberts,
Sandy Sample, Shelly Scribner and David Tucker

This 33rd Annual Peace Essay Contest is a project of the Modesto Peace/Life Center (209) 529-5750 and is co-sponsored by the Department of Literature and Language Arts, Modesto Junior College

Science Colloquium Fall '19

Wednesdays, 3:15-4:15 p.m., Science Community Center, Rm. 115, MJC West Campus
Free; $2 campus parking fee.

Sept. 25: Erynn Lucas, MJC Microbiology Professor: Plagues: Then and Now. Infectious disease outbreaks have ravaged the planet throughout the ages inevitably shaping history: ending wars, starting wars and decimating populations. Let’s take a look at some of those events and talk about future potential outbreaks.

Oct. 2: Kent Reeves, Wildlife Biologist: Rancher to Rancher: Using Livestock to Regenerate California Grasslands. Provides an overview of how to use livestock to regenerate ecosystem function in California grasslands by mimicking historic grazing regimes of native ungulates. Kent will describe the Rancher to Rancher Network, the history of its development and the progress of R2R throughout California since 2013.

Oct. 9: Vicki Rice, Modesto Recycling Coordinator: Organics Recycling & Modesto City Program. What is happening in the global recycling market, commercial recycling laws affecting businesses in California and how does it relate to Modesto? Ms. Rice will highlight what recycling programs Modesto offers its residents and what we are doing to combat illegal dumping and residential green can contamination.

Oct. 16: Kevin Rice, Ph.D., UC Davis: All Marine Creatures Great and Small: Whale Sharks to Pigmy Seahorses. The marine environments of the Philippine archipelago are one of the planet’s premier biodiversity hotspots, and the coral reef systems of this island nation have yet to experience significant episodes of coral bleaching or die-off. Using both still photography and video imagery, we will experience “close encounters” with weird and wonderful creatures that inhabit this underwater realm.

Oct. 23: Anne Schellman, UCCE Master Gardener Coordinator, Stanislaus County: The Good, the Bad, and the “Bugly.” Insects are often labeled as “good” or “bad.” This presentation challenges this stereotype. Come discover the important roles that insects play in the world and see a collection of insects you might find in your own backyard.

Modern telescopes range over the entire electromagnetic spectrum. Presentation includes examples of telescopes from radio to gamma ray, with explanations and images.

Nov. 6: Denise Godbout-Avant, Great Valley Museum Docent: Sounds of Silence: Hearing Impairments and Solutions will be discussed. Denise will also talk about her journey being profoundly deaf from birth and receiving cochlear implants. A sign language interpreter will be provided.

Nov. 13: Jim Hopf, Ret. Nuclear Scientist: Nuclear Power Needs to be Part of Our Nation’s Carbon Policies. Mr. Hopf will explain nuclear power’s important role in reducing CO2 emissions, and discuss policy changes that will be necessary to prevent nuclear plant closures. Closure of a significant number of nuclear plants will neutralize the global warming benefits of renewable energy, resulting in little to no progress on reducing power-sector CO2 emissions.

Nov. 20: Bobby Hutchison, MJC Behavioral Scientist: World AIDS Day: An Update. Nearly 40 years ago AIDS was an inevitable death sentence. Despite billions on research, no vaccine has yet been created but with powerful drugs it is now a “chronic disease.” Millions have died from AIDS yet two have been cured. What is AIDS’ future?
KCBP Radio’s First Live Broadcast, the “Voice of the Valley”

By FELTON DANIELS

Ed note: KCBP 95.5 FM, your new community, non-profit radio station, aired its first live-broadcast on Saturday, August 17, 2019 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The party-like festivities were highlighted by music, interviews and, of course, food! Felton Daniels, one of our dedicated volunteers, broadcast the following remarks.

This is Felton Daniels for 95.5 FM, KCBP Community Radio coming to you from downtown Modesto on this historic and exciting occasion when we are broadcasting to you live for the very first time. I feel extremely honored to be a part of this moment in history. Many people have worked very hard to get this station up and running and it is to their credit that we are live today.

You may be asking, “Why community radio?” Why would any group go to the trouble and the expense in this day and age to start such an enterprise in the first place?

In thinking about that question, I focused on the word “community.” Community suggests a group of people who care about each other, care about care, if you will. It is about a group of people who want life to be full and rich and as peaceful as possible for all of those around. It is a bit of a dream. It is partly utopia. It is also thinking about making reality better. It is also about connecting and sharing.

Community Radio here in our broadcast area may prove to serve the community in a way that was never dreamt of before. I am thinking of the troubled newspaper industry. Our own local newspaper that has served us well for years appears to be losing subscribers and advertisers. The Modesto Bee announced recently that they will no longer be printing a Saturday paper. Other papers have closed. Unfortunately, it feels like this could happen to the Bee. Many people do not seem to care about the possible loss of the paper. But it provides a great service to all of us in our community. It reports daily on government and business activities as well as crime trends and other significant happenings that would not be brought into the community’s awareness, if it no longer existed. This would be a terrible loss to our community.

Not that I am in any way supporting the closing of the Bee but, if that should happen in the future, KCBP Community Radio, might well be in the position to take up some of the slack left by the loss of the daily newspaper. Just how broad might our coverage become? Just what role might we play in the future? Who knows? We are starting today. Where will the dream take us? Only time, creativity and maybe a little reality will tell.

Today is our first day to broadcast to you live. Tomorrow we may be a major provider of important information in our community. As has been said for years on radio, “stay tuned.”

This is Felton Daniels for 95.5 FM KCBP Community Radio, coming to you live.

[SLightly edited for publication.]

Learn about the History of the Airport District

From the McHenry Museum

Dr. Talitha Agan reviews the “History of Modesto’s Airport District” on Saturday October 12 at 2:00 p.m. at the McHenry Museum, 1402 I St., Modesto. Dr. Agan, a Modesto native, is a Society Director, and an adjunct History Professor at Modesto Junior College. Her research into how the Airport District evolved focuses on the environmental and social aspects of this settlement. Learn how the “Dust Bowl” refugees migrated to this area, leading to the Airport District development.

Don’t miss this insightful presentation.

Information: (209) 495-4620, Email: museum@mchenrymuseum.org; https://www.mchenrymuseum.org/

The Haunted Museum returns: Join us for a spooky good time!

By VERONICA JACUINDE

If you are looking for a fun, family-friendly event to celebrate Halloween, then the Boys & Girls Clubs of Stanislaus County’s Haunted Museum is for you. The event will take place at the historic McHenry Museum on Friday, October 25th and Saturday, 26th. Tickets are $5 per person and children under 5 are free.

Offering fun, but not too much fright, the event is designed for children ages 5 to 12 and their families. The celebration will feature seven themed rooms, Halloween crafts, face painting, and a variety of games for kids in the arcade. Guests are encouraged to come dressed in their favorite costumes.

Kit Fox Trolley, a non-profit group that creates unique fundraising events, will guide visitors through the museum. Guests will go from room to room on a colorful and delightful tour where they will experience some of their favorite Halloween characters. This will be an evening of “Scooby Doo” fun and games, not “Friday the 13th” terror, with plenty of laughs and candy too!

Dave Gianelli, Club board member says, “Expect to be entertained with kid friend spooky characters that will have you laughing and scared at the same time.”

Purchase tickets at www.bgcsstanislaus.org or in person at all F&M Bank locations in Modesto, and the McHenry Museum located at 1402 I St. For more information call Veronica Jacuinde at (310) 508-1896 or email Denise Goodell at dgoodell@fmbonline.com. At the Boys & Girls Club Great Futures Start Here. Visit www.bgcsstanislaus.org to make your donation to support our kids.

MJC Civic Engagement Film & Lecture Series

Events are free & open to the public, 7-9 p.m. Thursday nights in Forum 110, MJC East Campus, 435 College Ave., Modesto.

OCT 24 – Healing Justice: explores the history and impact of the current justice system on communities of color. By focusing on issues of personal, interpersonal, community, and generational trauma, the film addresses the school-to-prison pipeline, the need for comprehensive criminal justice reform, and the importance of healing and restorative practices in a variety of community sectors.

NOV 7 – Heath Flora, California State Assembly Member: Heath Flora (R) represents the 12th district—portions of both San Joaquin and Stanislaus County, including parts of Modesto and neighboring cities such as Riverbank, Oakdale, Escalon, Turlock, Manteca, and more. Come hear him speak and let him know your thoughts on local issues that matter to you.

NOV 21 – Personal Statement: follows high school seniors trying to beat the odds by becoming the very resource they wish were more widely available: college counselors. The film focuses on the impact of peer counselors and the challenges of students attempting to navigate their way through the unfamiliar terrain of the college admissions process and beyond.
How movements build strength through training

By GEORGE LAKEY

Training for movements is not unlike training for athletic competition: Pain is inevitable. It’s the conditioning of mind, body and heart that makes winning possible.

It’s no accident that much of the leadership of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, came from the Nashville, Tennessee sit-in campaign — and that SNCC’s young people were frequently peace-setters in the civil rights movement. We can even now watch a short film documenting the process: the careful, step-by-step training workshops led by the Rev. James Lawson for black students.

A similar under-the-radar training process preceded the overthrow of dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines in 1986. That struggle gave us a new term for nonviolent struggle: “people power.”A violent insurgency had been going on for years in the Philippines, but Marcos — with the help of the United States — had been able to contain it. He was not, however, able to hold back a nonviolent direct-action campaign and was ultimately forced to flee to the haven of the United States.

It’s not that movements can’t win without building in a training dimension. The Global Nonviolent Action Database includes successful direct-action campaigns dating from times before training, as we know it, had been invented. Even then, however, innovative leaders sometimes developed an equivalent when they knew they were facing a tough opponent.

Who was Badshah Khan?

One such example is Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a leader from what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan, who wanted to free his Pathan people from the British Empire. From watching Gandhi’s “experiments with truth” in the region south of him, he could see the potential of nonviolent struggle even when the British troops came down hard on Indian Hindus. He expected that the British would be even more violent against Muslims like himself. There are, after all, shades of racism and prejudice.

So he organized marching drills for his nonviolent army, who he called the Khudai Khidmatgar, or Servants of God. Although it wasn’t like the role-playing that Rev. Lawson later used, it probably helped bolster their confidence and solidarity in two ways. First, the strenuous marching helped strengthen their ability to withstand violence. Second, it enabled them to practice their unity and commitment to nonviolence — which in turn would reduce, though certainly not eliminate, the level of violence levied against them.

And so it proved to be. A British journalist reported harsher repression used against the Pathans than the Hindus — “wholesale shootings and hangings.” Nevertheless, the nonviolent movement stayed the course, and the British retreated. Gandhi later praised the Pathans’ role in helping to throw out the mightiest empire the world had ever known.

People of color and the choice of nonviolent struggle

One function of training is revealed by these examples: It reduces the effectiveness of violent repression from the opponent.

In this article, I intentionally cite campaigns by people of color. The Global Nonviolent Action Database tells hundreds of stories of wins by peoples of color. One reason people of color so frequently choose nonviolent confrontation is that it offers that chance to win, while also lowering the amount of violence from the opponent — as compared to what happens when violent means are chosen.

The database has a searchable field showing whether the opponent uses violence to try to shut down the campaign. Although there are cases in which opponents don’t use violence, it does show up frequently. Training helps campaigners get ready for the possibility, and one problem that’s tackled in training is the problem of fear.

In struggles between people of color and white opponents, the people of color often have a history of white violence against them, giving them every reason to bring to their campaign a level of fear. The sit-in organizers of the civil rights movement had to take that into account.

Danny Glover’s excellent film “Freedom Song” shows graphically how SNCC’s training worked to support young people to face the near-certainty of white violence with the expectation of winning and the ability to handle the pain that may accompany the struggle. It’s not unlike people who train for athletic competition: Pain is inevitable, and it’s the conditioning of mind, body and heart that makes winning possible.

To my surprise I got a personal glimpse of this on a trolley ride in downtown Philadelphia many years ago, when my son was 12 years old. I started a conversation with a man on the seat beside us. He, warming to my black son, said, “You know, when I was your age I did the best thing I ever did in my life!”

Peter leaned in, his eyes intent on the man’s.

“I’m from Birmingham,” he continued, “and I was in the children’s march with Dr. King! That was some heavy shit, man. One day firefighters came along with the police and got out their hoses and shot water at us to stop our march.”

The man chuckled when he saw Peter hold his breath.

“Yeah, they got me. That water just knocked me off my feet. You’ve never seen anything like it. All of us just got knocked over. Well, the hoses didn’t get everybody — they started singing ‘Ain’t gonna let nobody turn us around’!”

“But some of us were hurting and most of us were soaked. So you know what? The next day we did come back — even more of us kids, and some grown-ups there, too.”

Peter looked at me to see if he should believe this fantastic tale. I nodded, realizing that we were hearing one of the most dramatic stories of the civil rights movement.

“Were you hurt?” Peter asked.

“Nah, just some bruises,” the man said. “We just came back the next day, even though now we knew what was goin’ down, and some of our parents said no but we did anyway. You know, going down singing that song about not being turned around.”

“Did you get any training before you started your day’s march?” I asked the man.

“Yeah, we had to have that, because we met first at the Baptist church, and Jim Bevel and other grown-ups trained us to be nonviolent no matter what happens — police dogs or whatever.”

He smiled proudly. “We were brave, man, and I’ll remember those songs forever. Shit, we won that battle!”

Glancing up, the man saw his stop was coming, jumped up, gave my son another smile, and gave us a wave as he got off the trolley.

I finished the story for Peter: The young people won that particular battle in the 1963 Birmingham campaign because the day came when police commissioner “Bull” Connor ordered the firefighters to turn on the hoses — and the men refused.

The white economic elite began to negotiate with the campaign leadership and forced politicians to make an agreement. Birmingham, Alabama, in the heart of the confederacy, began to desegregate.

A new training workshop for this political moment

The struggles for justice in many countries are facing critical political situations that require additional skills — more than just the kind of tactical training discussed here so far. Those struggles also need organizational training, which shows how to build effective, diverse, leaderful groups and grow the kinds networks and coalitions that can scale up. In societies that are polarizing, such as the United States and Britain, these skills are especially useful because movements can grow rapidly under these circumstances. One organizing resource in this area is something I co-authored with Berit Lakey and others, called “Grassroots and Nonviolent Leadership: A Guide to Organizations in Changing Times.”

Along with organizing skills and tactical strength, we need the ability to strategize for nonviolent direct-action campaigning. After all, successful nonviolent movements generally use campaign technology to win. The Global Nonviolent Action Database is based on campaigns, along with books like “This Is an Uprising” by Mark Engler and Paul Engler, and “Why Civil Resistance Works” by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan.

Many well-informed people who participate in protests, however, have no idea that there is such a thing as direct-action campaign technology — let alone that winning depends on understanding and using that technology well. This means vast reservoirs of energy and talent aren’t being fully used.

When I woke up to this realization, I invented a new, brief training that introduces people to campaign technology. I’ve tested it 15 times, on both coasts and the Midwest, with people active in racial and economic justice, climate, immigrant rights, affordable housing, indigenous rights, healthcare and other issues.

People reported more clarity and increased ability to see the possibility of positive change. They especially appreciated the easy-to-remember framework for formulating a winning campaign, and that it made strategizing more accessible. Some found that the workshop put them more fully in touch with their own strength and power.

I’ve decided to turn this training over to those who can.

Successful nonviolent movements generally use campaign technology to win.
Bringing Hope and Healing to Children, Youth, and their Families

An interview by Tom Portwood

“Not a lot of people know what foster care is,” Cynthia Buenrostro recently lamented. “They’re interested, but it’s not something that’s talked about.” As the newly appointed Community Outreach Specialist for Parents by Choice, a community-based organization that merged with the locally-operated Safe Harbor Family Services organization in 2018, Ms. Buenrostro’s personal goal “to educate people about foster care so that more homes in our community can provide a loving and stable environment for our foster kids.” While Parents by Choice is new to Stanislaus County, it has been providing foster care, transitional housing, adoptive and other services in the Stockton area since 2006.

Getting the word out about the foster care system in this country is definitely in order. “Many of America’s child welfare systems are badly broken — and children can suffer serious harm as a result. Some will be separated from their siblings. Others will be bounced from one foster care placement to another, never knowing when their lives will be uprooted next. Too many will be further abused in systems that are supposed to protect them. And instead of being safely reunited with their families — or moved quickly into adoptive homes — many will languish for years in foster homes or institutions,” states the advocacy nonprofit Children’s Rights on its website. Children’s Rights goes on to estimate that there are nearly 443,000 children in foster care across the country. Indeed, as Ms. Buenrostro pointed out, “there are over 800 children in Stanislaus County alone who need a home.”

Parents by Choice came into being to address the needs of all those children left so often adrift in foster care. “Tony Yadon, our Executive Director, started the agency because he had a vision to make kids the big deal, focusing on doing special things for the youths,” Ms. Buenrostro recounted. “In the midst of that, he also started providing licensed adoption services.” During the ensuing thirteen years, Parents by Choice continued to add services and following the merger with Safe Harbor Family Services, opened its offices in Modesto. Today, the organization provides a number of programs and support services crucial to the well-being of foster youth and the foster moms and dads who take care of them:

• Foster Care - For those wishing to become foster parents, the process includes attending a foster care orientation; submitting a formal application; attending two pre-approval trainings; completing the home study process; and completing the Mandated Reporter training
• Transitional Housing for Youth 18 to 21 years of age – This program currently has 8 two-bedroom apartments, so up to 16 youths can live in these units free of charge while they work to establish themselves in the community. Participants must be either employed or attending school.
• The Positive Parenting Program - Offers parenting groups designed to reduce stress and improve the atmosphere in foster homes
• Supervised Visitation – This program provides an unbiased, child-friendly venue for families. Visit rooms are equipped with comfortable furniture, games and toys for parents to use to strengthen the bond with their children.
• We focus on reunifying foster youth with their birth parents, unless that is not possible. Most of the children we help come from a situation where they are being neglected or where there is some type of drug or alcohol abuse by the parent,” Ms. Buenrostro explained. “Some of the youths have more behavioral issues than others because of the extreme trauma they’ve experienced.” She shared her hope that people in Modesto and Stanislaus County will step up and help these “sweet kids.” “I would say that our biggest need for volunteers is foster parents,” Ms. Buenrostro stated. “What we are looking for in a foster parent is someone who is patient, someone who has a passion for helping the child, and is loving and caring. Other than that, we’re always looking for volunteers to support our programs as mentors, to speak with youth about their (the volunteer’s) vocation and to provide hands-on support at family events. We also need help with providing Christmas presents for children and youth!”

Sometimes, the connection made between a foster child and his or her foster parents blossoms into something far more lasting. “Sometimes foster parents do get to adopt these children, if the biological parents can’t get them back, for whatever reason,” Ms. Buenrostro related.

Ms. Buenrostro’s commitment to foster youths and their families is deeply rooted in her own courageous, life-affirming journey. “I was a foster youth myself,” she shared. “I was removed from my mom when I was fifteen years old and was placed into a shelter. I dealt with some abuse from my mom’s boyfriend at the time. It was a little rough. I jumped around from a foster home to a shelter, kind of back and forth for a couple of years. I didn’t have the greatest experience going through that. That ties into what I do here with Parents by Choice, because we do need to find good foster parents. It’s all about making that connection.”

Happily, even while she endured that chaotic period in her life, Ms. Buenrostro did cross paths with one person who made all the difference in the world. “Towards the end of my time in foster care, they found me a new foster home and that foster mom changed my life completely. She would cook with me – really, she would do everything that a normal mom would do. I became super close to her. I don’t believe I would be where I am now had she not come into my life. I don’t believe I would be the type of mother I am. When I told her I started working for Parents by Choice she was so happy. I do keep in contact with her. We don’t stay in constant contact, but she’s still there for me.”

As Parents by Choice gains a foothold in Stanislaus County, Ms. Buenrostro is looking not to the past, but the future. “Stockton’s a little more established than what we have going on here, but we’re hoping to provide a lot more for Modesto in the future. I’m very excited!”

For more information about the programs and services available through Parents by Choice, contact the office at 2937 Veneman Ave # B250, Modesto, California 95356 Phone: (209) 491-5400. https://parentsbychoice.net/
Volunteers are always needed. Parents by Choice is accredited by the Council on Accreditation.

Movements

As far as I can tell from six decades of studying and participating in movements, the most successful ones excel in learning from their unfolding experience. Those that value empowerment of their participants like to find ways to build the learning curve of the “troops on the ground.”

In the 1930s, training resources in the United States included the Brookwood Labor College, The Highlander Research and Education Center came along around that time and continues today. In the ‘60s new ones appeared, including the Martin Luther King School for Social Change, where I once taught. Now there are still more, including Momentum, Wildfire and Training for Change. At a time when even movement media soak us in bad news, it’s all the more important that we remember to build our resilience and keep on learning.

George Lakey

George Lakey has been active in direct action campaigns for six decades. Recently retired from Swarthmore College, he has facilitated 1,500 workshops on five continents and led activist projects on local, national and international levels -- most recently with Earth Quaker Action Team. Among many other works, he is author of “Strategizing for a Living Revolution” in David Solnit’s book Globalize Liberation (City Lights, 2004). His 2016 book is “Viking Economics,” and in December 2018 Melville House released “How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning.”
Your Library Friends Events

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn: Book Discussion & Film at the State

Book lovers and film fans agree that Betty Smith’s American novel, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, is a beloved classic in print and on the big screen. On Tuesday, October 1, The Friends of the Modesto Library will host a book discussion, moderated by Stella Beratlis, Modesto’s poet laureate, followed by the showing of the 1945 film starring Dorothy McGuire.

There is a lot of buzz around A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, with fans recently celebrating the 75th anniversary of both the book (1943) and the film (1945). Book clubs are rereading “Tree” with new eyes in light of its relevant topics including class, gender and race/ethnicity in America.

A portion of ticket sales will go to Friends of the Modesto Library to benefit programs at the Modesto Library. Doors open at 6 p.m. Book discussion begins at 6:30 p.m. Tickets: visit the State Theatre Box Office at 1307 J. St. or purchase them online.

Barnes & Noble Bookfair to Benefit Friends of the Modesto Library

You’ve probably been hearing a lot of “Jane” talk lately. Jane Austen that is. On Saturday, October 19, the Friends of the Modesto Library will host a Bookfair at Barnes & Noble in Modesto. A portion of every sale goes to Friends of the Modesto Library.

Members of the Becoming Jane Austen Book Club will be on hand in regency costume, and Opera Modesto singers will perform selections from “Mansfield Park,” the two-act opera coming to Modesto in January. The Bookfair continues online through Oct. 25. Just remember to use promo code 12543781 when you make your purchase.

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteer to assist at the registration table from 8:30 to 11 a.m. at the annual Teens Craft Fair at the Library on Saturday, Oct. 12. Contact Librarian Christin Hutsell, chutsell@stanlibrary.org.

Twenty volunteer tutors are needed immediately to work with children in the new, Friends-sponsored reading program, KidsQuest, designed to help children with dyslexia. NO TEACHING EXPERIENCE IS NEEDED. Volunteers will be trained in both the Barton method and Structured Word Inquiry. Tutors must submit to a background check and LiveScan fingerprinting, for which there is a nominal fee. Tutors commit to twice-weekly, one-hour sessions for a minimum of three months. To volunteer, call (209) 672-6641 or visit www.lqslc.com/kidsquest.

Peer Recovery Art Project

festivals again, all under our name, with partners,” Mr. Black explained. “We don’t do anything ourselves unless we can collaborate with others. And the door is wide open for collaboration. Not too long ago we worked one week at Music on the Plaza and I think we had 20 artists set up their work for that event. We never charge the artists for setting up. We want to be seen as first-class citizens of the community because that’s what we are. And we also mentor people who want to be a part of the mental health workforce and serve as consultants to groups who may need assistance in forming their own nonprofits. Also, we are health coaches, because we know that people who have mental health challenges often die 25 years before their time, because of the medicines that slow them down, and cause heart attacks and obesity.”

“Recently, we were fortunate enough to secure the Census contract for the homeless and the LGBTQ population in our community,” noted Mr. Black. “It’s important that everyone be counted. We’re starting right now on that project. We did our first presentation at the Gospel Mission last week. El Concilio is the parent contractor on this project.” Also, on October 8th, Peer Recovery Art Project will be facilitating a Clients and Consumers Stakeholder Engagement Community Listening Session for the California Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission. The session will be held at Modesto Gospel Mission, 1400 Yosemite Boulevard, from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m., and is being convened to hear from community members about specific mental health services, and the support needs of clients and consumers of those services.

“People come to us because we have a stellar reputation and have worked on countless projects in the past and have all the necessary expertise and insurance,” Mr. Black said in summing up Peer Recovery Art Project’s work in our community. “We adhere to three guiding principles – Less is More; the Power of Consistency; and Collaboration. It’s all about mutual aid. You have to be able to give more than you get. The mental health movement is a civil rights movement. Not everybody needs to be vocal about it, but behind the scenes you can make a big difference. How can we be of service? That’s always our first question. There’s got to be room at the table for us so that our voices can be heard.”

To find out more about the services offered by Peer Recovery Art Project, Incorporated, please call them at (209) 985-0467, or email them at peerrecoveryart@yahoo.com, or visit their website at www.peerrecoveryartproject.org. Volunteers are always needed.

Listening

Car backed in for fire safety
DOWNLOAD gear
Trunk slammed closed
Remote- Click! All doors locked
Cranking footsteps,
Snapping brittle twigs
Cabin door squeaking open’
then slowly yawning closed.
Backpack and sleeping bag
Tossed on the cot
Water battle flipped open
Followed by a bubble glug sip.
Marker cap snapped back on
After signing up for chores.
Sign out sheets rustling in the wind
On the clipboard
Garbage can lid
scrapping open and
banging closed.
Bell ringing.
Come gather in a circle
Four laughing children
Rattling over the dirt
in a large wagon
Announcements.
A song.
Dinner is served
The creak
of the dining hall door opening
Glad greetings of those
Not seen since last year
Melamine plates knocking
Against rustic wooden tables
As hustled off
To the serving line.
Echoes of memories
Shared while waiting in line
To the beat of serving trays and pots
Clanging in the kitchen
The collapse of burning logs
Sending sparks up from the fire.
“Take a knee boys”
when close to the campfire
Blow out the flaming marshmallows.
The crunch and squish
Of graham cracker s’mores
Wow! It’s my new favorite!
Ukulele’s strumming, mandolin solo,
Guitars and dulcimer playing
Voices singing old songs
Songs arranged alphabetically,
on page 10, 11, or 1
Voices joined together in harmony
Of connection, if not musical key
Flashlights dancing out to the meadow.
FACTS of dormant night vision
Revealing invisibly dim light,
following 30 minutes of adjustment.
Quotes of philosophers, scientists.
Mythical stories from ancient
Civilizations against the backdrop
Of a mystically filled starry sky.
De Colores Tie dye
Hiking Country Roads
Chores are done working together
Collaborating, sharing, problem solving
Connections form sharing,
views, excitement, struggles,
memories and events
Flowing into understanding and
EMPATHY
Stories and ideas join together
Into a greater whole
Composed, as the voice of each and every one
Is included, supported and respected.
Sharing
The diversity
Of each individual’s own unique
Experiences and perspectives.
Thus, with patience,
Tolerance of difference
Perhaps with some internal discomfort,
from the experience being
Unknown,
Different,
Foreign
Or seemingly incorrect
With ever deepening listening
Into the collective resonance
Of a group held
Open space
An organic community
Is GENERATED,
Promoting new vision,
Expanding universes,
Creative growth
And inclusive peace.

Tecla Garcia
6/29/2019
At Camp Peaceful Pines Peace Camp
Estanislao

Between the Stanislaus County Superior Court and the Hall of Records, Estanislao steps forward toward the intersection of 11th and I. Pedestalled and fenced, the insurgent alcalde’s limbs and face catch shadows in bronze as sleek as manzanita while behind his back, lawyers vie for white justice, that pliable, heavy justice mined from stolen lives.

Soldiers caught and missionized the Yokut people, swapping their land for toil, their joy for captivity, their freedom for the promise of eternal ease, postponed. Estanislao ate the padres’ doctrine and drank their prayers. He administered their justice to his people until the padre’s cruelty drove their faith from his heart. Estanislao gathered his people and led them east. General Vallejo followed them and they fought, killed many soldiers, and chased the survivors west.

Estanislao dreamed of Abraham beside the flames binding his son as sacrifice to the padres’ god, and when he woke, the manzanitas whispered his sins. Estanislao left his people, returned to the mission, knelt, and confessed. He bound his heart with shadows and ripped it from his chest, placing it in the padres’ fire.

Is he honored here in bronze as a leader of warriors or as the penitent savage who chose subjugation? Estanislao steps forward and raises one arm, palm open in greeting, warning, surrender, attack.

At his feet, Modesto’s homeless crouch in reeking dirt and whisper riddles into their tattered plastic bags.

rapunzel

my mother said they took my son a blue-eyed blonde she would die and they said he was young enough for she begged my father he needed a new family to climb the wall a shot redistribution for she must have rampion i never saw him again

mid-theft they put me in a cell i had to work a witch stepped from the shadows my children were led away for the komandant who claimed the unborn child an agent raped me his wife hated me for i was relinquished at birth and he said i must bear his child raised in a cottage that crawled with toads if i screamed she beat me swirling steam from the cauldron worse would follow
Water Myths of the San Joaquin Valley

By ERIC CAINE, The Valley Citizen

Among the more persistent myths about water in the San Joaquin Valley, none is more durable than the canard that water shortages and land subsidence have been caused by, “an innumerable myriad of Endangered Species Act-related laws, mandates, opinions, rulings and settlements.” This latest addition to the catalogue of misinformation comes from Kristi Diener, in an OP/ED for the Modesto and Fresno Bee newspapers.

Diener, like everyone else who attempts to blame water shortages and subsidence on a “regulatory drought” runs into a logical cul-de-sac when she has to admit that “subsidence did not begin in 2014’s drought. It was an issue at least a century before.”

But if, as Diener says, environmental regulations are just a little over “two-and-a-half decades” in effect, what could have caused subsidence prior to the punitive effects of regulation?

The answer is simple: Overdrafting groundwater caused the subsidence. Who overdrafted the groundwater? Farmers and ranchers. Nothing complex here, but apologists for overuse of public resources really don’t like simple and obvious answers — that’s why they’re always trying to find ways around them.

Diener rightly argues that using surface water is far preferable to pumping groundwater, but wrongly concludes that reductions in surface water allocations for Valley farmers have left farmers with no choice but to pump groundwater. Fact is, farmers in the southern San Joaquin Valley have been overdrafting groundwater since they drained Tulare Lake, at one time the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi — they’ve been overdrafting groundwater since they used up the Kern and San Joaquin Rivers decades ago.

Diener writes that reduced allocations have been due to regulatory barriers without pointing out the allocations to farmers from the Central Valley Project and State Water project are based on contractual rights.

Contractual rights, also known as, “paper water,” are distinguished from “appropriative rights,” which are rights bestowed by the state decades back in the 20th century. Appropriative rights, most often designated as pre- or post-1914, carry far more legal authority than contractual rights because the contractual rights specify that allocations are based on yearly abundance and the state or federal government’s discretion.

Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of the history of irrigated agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley is familiar with the iconic photograph of USGS scientist Joe Poland showing the degree of land subsidence near Mendota from 1925 to 1977, well before effects from the Endangered Species Act could have affected water use in the Valley.

Diener claims that without water from northern California, farmers have been “forced” to pump groundwater. Fact is, they were “forced” to pump groundwater well before they started begging state and federal governments for even more water from up north, though “forced” is hardly an appropriate term when discussing the calculated risks all businesspeople must make before investing time and money.

Diverting water from the Central Valley’s major rivers, especially the Sacramento and San Joaquin, has wreaked environmental destruction in the San Joaquin Delta, decimated salmon runs, negatively impacted California fisheries, and had devastating effects on wetlands and wildlife throughout the Valley. In many places, intensive irrigation has also poisoned the soil, most notably in the scandalous case of the Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge.

According to Mark Arax in The Dreamt Land, farmers have increased irrigated acreage during every drought since the 1920s. Even during the drought of 2014-15, agribusinesses like Kern County’s Paramount Farms added over 70,000 acres of farmland to their already extensive holdings of pistachios, almonds and walnuts.

Adding acres of farmland and then begging the government for a water fix isn’t much different from speculating on a widget boom and then asking the government to buy up your overproduction. No one has ever forced farmers to pump groundwater. Instead, they’ve kept adding irrigated acreage whenever they could because they figured they could count on government bailing them out.

It’s almost as though they think we’re a socialist economy.

For comments to this article, visit https://thevalleycitizen.com/water-myths-of-the-san-joaquin-valley/#comments

SAVE THE DATE: MoST hosts 8th Annual Poetry Festival

The Modesto-Stanislaus Poetry Center (MoSt) will host its 8th Annual Poetry Festival on Saturday February 1, 2020 at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, facilitated by two of our region’s outstanding poets – former Fresno Poet Laureate Lee Herrick, and Camille Norton, who has taught at the University of the Pacific in Stockton.

The festival features a poetry contest open to attendees of the day-long workshop. The 2020 contest categories include:

- The Graceful Stumble
- Handling Earth with Care
- Notre Dame
- Following a Thread

Flyer and registration forms for the festival and contest will soon be available on the MoSt website (www.mostpoetry.org). Contest deadline is January 11, 2020. Registration fees ($35, $30 for MoST members, or $10 for high school/college students, include the contest, morning and afternoon workshops, a delicious luncheon, an author’s table, and fellowship with poets and poetry aficionados from throughout Northern California.

Submit entries by mail to the Modesto-Stanislaus Poetry Center, PO Box 578940, Modesto, California, 95357; info@mostpoetry.org

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Homeless: “It’s different these days.”

By ERIC CAIN, The Valley Citizen

Many believe today’s system of care and recovery for homeless people is antiquated and inadequate. For the most part, they’re right. Nevertheless, some people just need an intervention and chance to get back on their feet, especially those with income and a place to go. Efren Torres is one such person.

Efren Torres had been clean for three years when he lost his wife in a tragic automobile accident in 2015. He’s sixty-four years old.

“That’s when I started using again,” he says. “It’s one thing when someone is fighting cancer and you kind of know what to expect. But when the coroner calls and tells you your wife is dead and you’ve been thinking she’ll be home soon, it’s really rough.”

At the time, Torres, though he was born in El Paso, Texas, had spent most of his life in the Bay Area.

“We lived in San Leandro. I was really a product of the sixties. We used all kinds of drugs. We’d take LSD and go to the Fillmore Auditorium. Later, when the AIDS epidemic began, I got really scared because many times people shared needles. But I was lucky. I never even went to the hospital except one time for a hernia.”

Torres says one difference between young people today and those in his time is work.

“I always worked. I worked twenty-two years for Georgia-Pacific. We made paper, huge rolls of it, and other things. I also worked for another company as a lab tech. My father was a Teamster and I was a Teamster. We both made good money. In those days we had factory jobs. You don’t have factory jobs these days.”

Even though he did two prison terms for drug related crimes, Torres says he could get hired because people knew he was a good worker. “I could walk down one street in those days and fill out three job applications. And I could get someone who knew me to speak up for me.”

Torres says he’s used almost every drug possible, but methamphetamine was what he used most often when working. “Lots of people who worked used meth, especially truck drivers. But I was always scared to miss work. I was even scared to be late. So the meth didn’t keep me from working, and that’s why I have an income now. I have a pension and SSI.”

Torres lost his Bay Area residence after his wife died and he went back on drugs.

“It got so I couldn’t afford to live in the Bay Area any longer, so my daughter told me to come to the Valley. I got to Modesto and I saw that arch and I remembered it from all the Scott Peterson stories. Then I found a nice place I could afford on Fresno Avenue on the west side.”

But drug use was once again Torres’ downfall.

“I was using and started letting too many people in. The landlord told me he didn’t like the situation, and he evicted me. I don’t really blame him.”

It’s not uncommon for drug users who have income and lodging to attract predators, grifters, and couch surfers. Even though Torres had used drugs most of his life, jobs and family had kept him in the mainstream. Even his prison sentences hadn’t condemned him to permanent exile. But once evicted, he found he couldn’t find another place to live.

“Even though I had income, people would say they didn’t want to take a chance on me because I had been evicted. And some places found out I had a record, and they really wouldn’t rent to me. I was shocked. I just had never been in such a situation. This has been a real humbling experience.”

One of the few places that would take Torres was the notorious Budgetel (formerly the Vagabond Inn), on McHenry Avenue in Modesto.

“It was named the ‘Budgetel,’ but everyone still called it the Vagabond. I really felt bad there. Black tar heroin was everywhere, especially around the young people. I felt so bad for them and tried to talk to them, but I was using heroin myself. It got really bad.”

Torres found himself on the streets even before the Budgetel was shut down by order of the City of Modesto.

“I was sleeping behind buildings on McHenry Avenue or next to friends with camps alongside the freeway even though I had income. It just happened all at once.”

Torres was beginning to think he had no way out when he got a break from an outreach worker who put him in a county-maintained halfway house.

“I was telling my story and the next thing I know I got a break from an outreach worker who put me in a county-maintained halfway house. Then one of the older guys there got a break from another worker. I got to go to a halfway house there. I was beginning to think I was fighting cancer and you kind of know what to expect. But when the coroner calls and tells you your wife is dead and you’ve been thinking she’ll be home soon, it’s really rough.”

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Torres says he’s always worried about younger people, and he’s proud his daughter has succeeded with a good education and master’s degree.

“It’s different these days,” he says. “We came out of the sixties and we used drugs, but we could work. I always felt good when I had a job and could work hard and make good money. It made me feel good. It’s different these days.”
ENOCNS 1 Quote

OCTOBER 2019

Help keep our readers informed. We urge people participating in an event to write about it and send their story to Connections.

Science Colloquium, Fall 2019, Wednesdays, 3:15-4:15 p.m., Science Community Center, Rm. 115, MCJ West Campus. Free; $2 parking fee. See article, this issue.


*Oct. 25:* West Campus MSR Student Center. Shahri Masri, U.C. Irvine, Elevating the Climate Conversation Beyond Debate, Dispel 50 misunderstandings about climate change. https://www.shahrimasri.com. Nov. 22: Robert McGrew, M.D., The Overwhelming Importance of Vaccinations for Public Health. Many have forgotten the lethal pandemics of Plague, Smallpox, Measles and others that killed millions before vaccinations against them were developed. Short movie about the measles vaccine. Discusses the dangerous gamble when unvaccinated.

Exploring Whiteness & Showing Up for Racial Justice Meetings, Fourth Tuesday, monthly 7:00 p.m., Central Grace Hmong Alliance Church, 918 Sierra Dr., Modesto. Info: https://www.facebook.com/events/24765554967/.

Pagan Family Social, third Tuesday, Golden Corral, 3737 McHenry Ave, Modesto, 6:00 p.m. Info: 569-0816. All newcomers, pagan-curious and pagan-friendly welcome.

Tuesday Evening Funstrummers Ukulele Jam. Songbooks provided. 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., Johnson Center Rd., Donation. 209-565-3216, www.Funstrummers.com.

IMCV weekly Insight Meditation and dharma talk, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m., 2127 Kieran Ave., Modesto (rear bldg. at the end of the UUFC's east parking lot). Offered, freely donations welcome. Info: Contact Lori, 209-343-2748 or see https://imcv.org/. Email: info@imcv.org

Attention Veterans: Join us for Free Coffee & Donuts Meet & Greet at the Stanislaus Veterans Center, 3500 Coffee Rd., Modesto, Suite 500, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. Free donuts; noon - 2 p.m. Social/hour: 3:00-5:00 p.m. Meeting: 6:30-8:00 p.m. Follow on Facebook Group: Info: Tim Robertson, tim@mvf.org

LAUGHTERING AHEAD

Friday Nov. 1: Harvest Gathering fundraiser for Peace Essay Contest. See front page, this issue.


January 2020: John McCutcheon Concert. TBA.

February 1, 2020: 8th Annual Poetry Festival, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, facilitated by two outstanding poets – former Fresno Poet Laureate Lee Herrick, and Camille Norton. Flyer registration forms will be available at www.mcvb.org/events. Contest deadline: January 11, 2020; info@modesto.org

REGULAR MEETINGS

SUNDAYS

Modesto Vineyard Christian Fellowship, 10:00 am at the MODSPOT, 1220 J St. Call or text 209-232-1932, email modestovineyard@gmail.com, All Welcome.

IMCV weekly Insight Meditation and dharma talk, 8:45 am - 10:15 am, 2127 Kieran Ave., Modesto (rear bldg. at the end of the UUFC’s east parking lot). Offered, freely donations welcome. Info: Contact Lori, 209-343-2748 or see https://imcv.org/. Email: info@imcv.org


MONDAYS

Suicide Loss Support Group: Friends for Survival meets every third Monday at 7 p.m. Details: Norm Andrews 209-345-0601, nandrews663@charter.net.

Monday Morning Funstrummers Beginner Ukulele Lessons. Modesto Senior Center. 10:45am to Noon. Free Scenic and Social event. Walk with Me, a women’s primary infertility support group and Bible study. 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. the first and third Mondays of each month (September only meeting 9/15/14 due to Labor Day). Big Valley Grace Community Church. Interested? Email WalkWithMeGModesto@gmail.com or call 209-577-1604.

Silver & Gold Support group for our senior LGBT community’s unique concerns and experiences. Come to a group and see what you will understand and where you are. For LGBT folks over 50 yrs. old. Every Monday at 3 p.m. at the various Info: Contact Recovery Circle, Cell/text : (559) 799-0464. Email: stevenculen@sbcglobal.net

TUESDAYS

Teen Tuesdays every week from June-August, 2-5 pm., Central Valley Pride Center, 400 12th St. Peer Support, Games & movies. Free: space for teens to socialize, work together on projects, and learn about LGBTQ+ history. Each week will be a little different as we want YOU (youths) to guide the direction this group will go? Info: Maggie Strong, Program Director/ GSA Liaison, mstrogan@mspsmod.org, 209-284-0999.

MODesto PEACE LIFE CENTER ACTIVITIES

MODesto Peace/Life Center VIGILS: held THE FIRST WEDNESDAY of the month at McHenry Ave. and J. St. (Five points). 4:30-5:30 pm. Call the Center for info: 529-5750.

MEDIA: Listen to KCBP 95.5 FM Community Radio, the “Voice of the Valley” also streaming at http://www.KCBPradio.org

PEACE LIFE CENTER BOARD MEETING, FIRST Thursdays, 720 13th St., Modesto, 6:30 pm, 529-5750.

MEDIA COMMITTEE of Peace/Life Center. Meetings TBA.

PEACE/LIFE CENTER MODesto, 720 13th St. Call 529-5750. We’ll get back to you with current info on activities.

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