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MICHELLE LE

Jess Santana discusses his plan to build a new homeless shelter with Cuesta Park maintenance employee Sandra Santana, a member of his proposed board of directors for the "Silverado Shelter" of Mountain View.

Homeless man on a mission

JESS SANTANA, 86, IS CAMPAIGNING FOR A SHELTER IN MOUNTAIN VIEW

By Daniel DeBolt

Jess Santana fights for a cause like a much younger man with much greater resources.

The 86-year-old homeless resident of Mountain View hopes to create a homeless shelter in Mountain View, and has been working away at the project for about a year now. It seems his efforts are paying off: Several community members are in support, including Joanne Price, a Realtor who is helping him find a location; former Los Altos police officer David Mace, a recently homeless man himself; and a Mountain View librarian who promised to make a Web site for the cause.

"I think what he's trying to do is absolutely wonderful," said Duncan MacVicar, a board member for the Community Services Agency. "Moun-

tain View and Los Altos do not have shelters for the homeless. This is a real long-term project for Jess. You've really

"Everybody is for it. They think it's great. But nobody is doing anything about it. Nobody else is stepping up to the plate."

JESS SANTANA

got to give this guy credit. He's a bull dog on this particular enterprise. This is the goal of his life right now."

Santana said he is applying for non-profit status for his group, which will allow him to begin fundraising. He wants to form a board of directors — which would include other homeless people like Mark Shield, a friend who meets him regularly for 6:30 a.m. coffee at Burger King — to figure out how to move the idea forward.

"Everywhere I go I talk shelter," Santana said. "I have had a tremendous response from people. I had a couple of people offer me money" which he had to refuse.

"I met the gentleman who owns Burger King," Santana said. "I told him what I was doing, I tell everybody." The conversation turned to the subject of fundraising, and Santana told him, "I'm going to (knock) on everybody's door, and it might be yours."

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Parents worry over cuts to special ed assistants

By Kelsey Mesher

A proposal to cut back the hours and benefits of nearly a dozen employees in the Mountain View Whisman School District's special education program has caused frustration among local parents, but administrators say changes to the program have made the full-time schedules unnecessary.

The cuts would affect 11 full-time instructional assistants, or IAs, working in two autism programs — a preschool, and an autism-intensive services program for other students requiring behavioral therapy — operating at Slater School. Under the proposal, their hours would be reduced from 40 hours a week to 30,

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City goes with high-quality affordable housing

ESTIMATED PRICE TAG OF \$26 MILLION CONCERNS ONE COUNCIL MEMBER

By Daniel DeBolt

A conceptual design for an affordable housing project on Evelyn and Franklin streets was well received in a City Council study session Tuesday, and neighbors turned their previous criticisms into positive feedback, offering design suggestions.

Jonathan Emami, vice president of developer ROEM, appeared to have

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SANTANA

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Mountain View has been without a homeless shelter since the 2006 closure of the rotating, church-based Alpha Omega shelter, which served about 40 people a year. And with the economic recession, homelessness is up. The cold weather shelter at the Sunnyvale armory is “always at full capacity,” says Jennifer Van Every, spokesperson for EHC Lifebuilders, which runs the shelter Nov. 30 through March 31.

MacVicar is also a member of the North County Homeless Housing Coalition, a group of longtime advocates for the homeless who aim to build permanent housing for the chronically homeless somewhere in Mountain View. He said that if the group had more time they would help Santana more with his cause, which is not in conflict with their own.

“Everybody is for it,” Santana said. “They think it’s great. But nobody is doing anything about it. Nobody else is stepping up to the plate.”

Hard times

Santana has been homeless for three years after he lost everything in an unsuccessful attempt to return to operating his own hauling business. He grew up in Fremont and for much of his life was a truck driver before he moved to Los Altos. He once had two children and a wife of 32 years, all of whom passed away.

He operated a successful sawdust hauling business with his wife for 20 years before he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, which he narrowly survived. Now, he says, he is too old to work, and gets a \$1,000 Social Security check every month. At night Santana sleeps in his Chevy Silverado pickup truck.

MacVicar said Santana’s homelessness could actually be an asset to his cause, as many groups who advocate for the homeless often struggle to show that they have support from within the homeless community.

Santana is unlike many other homeless people in that he has “never had a drink in his life,” doesn’t abuse drugs and doesn’t suffer from a mental disorder, he said, and he appears to keep his distance from those who do.

Homelessness hasn’t stopped him from having an active social life at the Los Altos senior center. He also spends several hours every morning at Cuesta Park, where he befriended park ranger Sandy Santana (no relation), who has made a point of vouching for Santana and his cause.

The ideal spot

Santana’s favorite proposed



MICHELLE LE

Jess Santana

location for what he likes to call the “Silverado shelter of Mountain View” — a name inspired by his pickup truck — is at 590 East Middlefield Road. Here there is an empty county building already equipped as a living facility. Up until last year, the 33,100-square-foot building housed 118 low-level criminals, inmates of the county’s work furlough program.

The county has been trying to sell the building to real estate developers but rejected several offers in June, the highest of which hovered around \$6 million. The offers the county received, on a cost-per-square-foot basis, were reportedly very low compared to what Dostart Development paid for a similar property nearby two years ago.

Mountain View’s representative on the county Board of Supervisors, Liz Kniss, did not respond to phone calls about the property.

Intero Real Estate agent Joanne Price is helping Santana look for a backup location if the county building on Middlefield doesn’t work out. Price was signing up to volunteer at the Los Altos senior center when she was asked to talk to Santana, who is a regular there.

“When you hear him talk, you just say, ‘Wow,’” Price said. “He himself is homeless and lives basically in a truck. He said this is his wish. I said, ‘Alright, let me help you out.’”

So far, Price helped Santana find a vacant building at 685 Clyde Ave. that looks promising. It backs up to a golf course and sits in the middle of a neighborhood of office parks and industrial buildings.

A bill passed by the state Senate, SB 2, requires Mountain View to zone an area for a homeless shelter within one year of

adoption of the housing element of its new General Plan, which could happen in 2010. Santana said the city is supportive of his efforts, likely because of the zoning requirement, but he adds that finding a place where neighbors won’t complain about the presence of homeless people is a challenge.

A new model

Santana said he wants to have no part of a shelter run by an established operator. The shelters that exist now, in his experience, are not the best places, he said — especially for women and children, who often have no privacy.

As an example, Santana recalled a scene at the Sunnyvale armory: “We were going to have dinner, and a lady was there with three little kids. She was sitting there trying to breast feed in front of all these creeps,” he said, in a place where people were “stacked in like a bunch of hogs.”

On top of providing a separate area for women and children, Santana said he wants to see social services offered, such as medical care and employment services.

“I think we can do it,” he said. “We’re all determined to do it. I’ve stuck it out now for over a year. I’m not going to quit, I have no intention to. I’m going to see this thing fly.”

And at age 86, he adds, “I may die doing it.” ■

■ INFORMATION

Those interested in helping Jess Santana achieve his goal of launching a Mountain View homeless shelter can reach him on his cell phone, (650) 518-3100.

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7 p.m. ~ Stanford vs. Long Island

Dec. 5 - Saturday
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