Civil Discourse at the Library Focuses on Homelessness

Monterey County Free Libraries continued its Community Matters: Civil Discourse at the Library discussion series this month with a program focusing on homelessness.

The program offered attendees an opportunity for discussion with those working on homeless solutions and services as well as a homeless teen who shared her story.

Panelists included Kathy Theoni, Coalition of Homeless Services Providers; Monterey County Social Services Director Elliott Robinson; Monterey County Supervisor Mary Adams; Salinas Mayor Joe Gunther and Alyssa S, a homeless teen.
Monterey County Library Director Jayanti Addleman served as moderator, leading panelists to discuss the many issues surrounding homelessness, why it is so difficult for the homeless to recover and current projects focusing on homeless needs such as affordable housing and safe parking.

Alyssa S shared her personal story with those in attendance, how she became homeless and the difficulties she faced trying to get off the streets and find a safe place to live.

If you weren’t able to attend, you can still see the entire forum on the Monterey County Government Channel’s YouTube page.

The goal of the library community series is to offer discussions on challenging subjects with ‘civil discourse,’ which by definition is conversation intended to enhance understanding, but also can be viewed as conversation that is respectful in a time of heated debates. The next forum is set for April 18th and the topic will be gun violence. Forums are held at the Marina Library Community Room. Get updates on the upcoming event on the Libraries Facebook page.

RMA Honored for Post Storm Repairs

A year ago this month, Monterey County was impacted by an ‘atmospheric river’ rain system that caused more than $30 million in damage to county infrastructure and roadways.

It was an event most of us won’t forget - an extraordinary storm which required extraordinary recovery efforts.

Among the hardest hit roads in the county was Elkhorn Road in North County, which is heavily used by commercial and regular traffic as well as first responders. The road suffered catastrophic damage in several locations.

Because of its importance as a transportation link, repair work began immediately. RMA-Public Works put together a team of county staff and contractors to get the road back open to the public.
The quick work and organization needed to make the repairs is receiving recognition. The Transportation Agency of Monterey County (TAMC) recently awarded RMA-Public Works its Transportation Excellence Award and the regional chapter of the American Public Works Association named the Elkhorn Road work the “Best Environmental Project of the Year.”

Repairs to Elkhorn Road were extensive and required unique precautions. Work crews had to stabilize and reconstruct severely damaged roadways, culverts and embankments as well as remove mudslides and sediment from ditches. Because a portion of the project was within the Elkhorn Slough Preserve, a National Marine Sanctuary and Ecological Reserve, great care had to be taken not to damage wetland habitat or disturb any special-status species. Construction crews were given an education program about the slough and some crews even worked on foot when necessary to protect sensitive habitat.

Thanks to the major effort by this repair team, work was completed and the road was reopened for traffic at the end of May, three months after the dramatic storm.

Congratulations to RMA-Public Works for this well-deserved recognition.
Wes Morrill Bids Farewell to County

Wes Morrill, the County’s Military and Veterans Affairs Officer, is saying goodbye to the County after 19 years.

MVAO was Wes’ last stop in his varied county career. He was lured from a consulting firm for an (at that time) newly created position of Employee Benefits Analyst. The focus of the job was to stabilize the fiscal condition of the County’s various benefit plans. He faced some dramatic moments soon after stepping into the job.

Wes picks up the story from there.

“Sherrell Freeman and I were managing and administering the health plan options that were offered our employees and the other benefit programs. We faced two major challenges during my time with Risk. The health plan’s stop loss carrier had refused to reimburse the County for about $1,000,000 in paid claims. Just short of County Counsel having to file suit, I gave a detailed deposition, analysis, and clear justification for our claim. We got the check!

As some of our long-term employees will recall, the health plan’s claims administrator’s business failed suddenly. I found out about it in the morning and they were closing their doors that night. We quickly rented a U-Haul truck, pulled all the plan records and software from their office after closing and transported the entire ‘plan’ to the county’s dental plan claims administrator in Fresno. Within about 72 hours, we had the plan running full speed with an almost transparent transition.”

Morrill moved to Department of Social Services then Military and Veterans Affairs during various county budget downsizings. He says looking back, what landed him at MVAO was ‘meant to be.’

“I was interim Veterans Services Officer twice at MVAO during transitions before being named to the position in 2017,” says Morrill. “As a veteran and having seen what we do to change lives, I was honored to have been selected. Through our team’s work, we put between $24 and $30 million into the local economy annually through the VA Disability Compensation and related awards we assist in obtaining for veterans.”

To those he has worked with during his county career, he says thank you and shares a final thought.

“To Sherrell Freeman and Pat Wagner who were on my first hiring interview, thank you for the belief in me that jump started this journey. To Lew Bauman for your encouragement and support. To Elliott Robinson, you saved me when that first “Pink Slip” hit! I am forever grateful. Because of your support, everything that has transpired all these years was possible. To everyone in the departments I have interacted with over the years and those to come after us, we are really one team. We change lives and we work for the greater good for all we represent and serve.”