

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## A16 OPINION

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Anaheim Mayor Harry Sidhu gives his first State of the City address before hundreds gathered for a luncheon at the City National Grove of Anaheim in Anaheim on Tuesday, March 5, 2019. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG)

## **Anaheim leads with jobs, affordable housing and senior help: Harry Sidhu**

By HARRY SIDHU

Anaheim is proud to have led the way on homelessness in Orange County.

In the past year, we've opened shelters, helped hundreds out of inhumane conditions on our streets and restored parks and other public spaces for our neighborhoods and businesses.

With more than 300 people in our shelters and others in care or stable housing, we have addressed the worst of the crisis our city saw in 2018.

Yet, as far as Anaheim has come, there's more to do.

Now Anaheim is leading on the next phase of addressing homelessness with life-changing services, lasting, affordable housing and a groundbreaking program to help some of the most vulnerable in our city — seniors — stay in their homes.

### **Addressing continued homelessness**

Even with shelters, we still see homelessness in our parks, on our streets and around our businesses. While nowhere near the levels of 2018, it speaks to the persistence of homelessness and the need for constant effort, both immediate and longer term.

Last week, I convened a city ad hoc shelter meeting to address continued homelessness in Anaheim by looking at additional beds at our existing shelters or even another shelter on an interim, emergency basis.

At the same time, we continue to work with neighboring cities, the county and the court system to ensure that together we are addressing a problem that goes beyond Anaheim.

### **Jobs**

For some, a job is the answer.

In the past year, nearly 200 people recovering from homelessness and other challenges have found work as part of Anaheim's partnership with Chrysalis, a nonprofit providing job training and employment as a way to self-sufficiency.

Since coming to Anaheim a year ago, Chrysalis has worked with employers such as Disneyland Resort and Honda Center to help get people back to work.

### **Community service**

For those wanting to work, an Anaheim program offers community service as a first step.

In the past two years, more than 750 people have worked with Better Way Anaheim to clean up city parks, paint trash cans and fire hydrants and work on other community projects.

Volunteers, who come from our shelters and nonprofit partners, gain experience, confidence and pride working as part of a team.

For many, their Better Way Anaheim experience can be what gets an employer to take a chance on hiring them.

### **Affordable housing**

The only lasting solution to homelessness is stable housing. And no Orange County city is doing more than Anaheim.

In the next two years, three more affordable communities are set to open in Anaheim, joining the 13 we already have.

One will provide stable homes for seniors. The other two will house formerly homeless families and individuals with the ongoing support of onsite counseling and services.

These projects are part of our larger commitment to affordable housing. Each year, Anaheim provides more than \$70 million in federal rent assistance that helps families, veterans, seniors and those with special needs live in our city.

## **Helping seniors**

One of the best ways to address

homelessness is to stop it from ever happening.

In October, Anaheim's City Council took the bold step of creating a Senior Safety Net Pilot Program with \$645,000 in funding to help seniors stay in their homes.

As mayor representing all of Anaheim, I must look beyond any one community to help a broader range of renting Anaheim seniors, including at Rancho La Paz mobile home park, where we've worked with the park's new owner and residents on managing rents.

Starting in early 2020, the Senior Safety Net Pilot Program is set to provide \$350,000 in funding for up to 12 months of assistance for seniors struggling to pay their rent.

An additional \$250,000 will serve as short-term emergency assistance to help seniors with rent for up to three months after losing a job, a spouse or facing a medical issue.

The remaining \$45,000 goes toward counseling for seniors to identify housing, transportation, food and other community resources available to them.

Homelessness is the defining issue of our time, yet it defies simple solutions.

Anaheim will continue to lead with urgent action in our neighborhoods and ongoing efforts to address the larger issues of homelessness.

*Harry Sidhu is mayor of Anaheim.*