Lucky Duck Foundation issues first round of “Shamrocks & Shipwrecks” designed to quantify and grade political will and effectiveness for addressing homelessness

Under embargo until 9:00 am PST Thursday, December 8, 2022

SAN DIEGO, CA – The Lucky Duck Foundation today announced its first round of “Shamrocks & Shipwrecks,” a new program designed to publicly highlight political will and effectiveness of elected officials and their jurisdictions when addressing homelessness throughout San Diego County. The program is designed to highlight high-impact programs and tangible action steps and identify missed opportunities and inaction of San Diego County’s elected officials and their jurisdictions. The purpose is to showcase what is working so it can be replicated, and what is not working so it can be corrected or avoided. Strong actions that drive progress will earn “Shamrocks,” while ineffectiveness and inaction will earn “Shipwrecks.”

“The current trajectory of homelessness and deaths on the streets in San Diego County is nothing short of a humanitarian, public health and public safety crisis,” said Drew Moser, Executive Director of the Lucky Duck Foundation. “While some positive initiatives are happening, our elected officials must be more swift and decisive in their approach in addressing unsheltered homelessness.”

Additionally, Shamrocks & Shipwrecks comes with a long list of strategies and tangible efforts the Lucky Duck Foundation is implementing or prepared to implement to help accelerate the efforts of regional elected officials. This includes but is not limited to underwriting the cost to purchase and construct a bridge shelter to temporarily house hundreds of individuals; underwriting the cost to purchase pallet homes; helping convert underutilized government-owned properties; and a multitude of other efforts such as food & water outreach, employment and job training opportunities, and more. All are designed to alleviate the suffering of homelessness in San Diego County.

Shamrocks & Shipwrecks are based on facts and meant to raise awareness and instigate political will in order to improve the region’s response to addressing homelessness. Shamrocks & Shipwrecks will be issued on an ongoing basis by the Lucky Duck Foundation.

We are pleased to announce the inaugural Shamrocks:

1. Work for Hope partnership between the McAlister Institute and City of Chula Vista
Work for Hope (WFH) is a partnership between the McAlister Institute, Chula Vista Police Department, and Chula Vista Public Works Department to help individuals experiencing homelessness secure employment and housing by offering on-the-job training and work-training stipends to beautify city parks. WFH also includes wraparound services and case management to help link participants to addiction treatment, housing, and other critical services. It is the only collaboration of its kind in the country that pairs a nonprofit organization with both law enforcement and public works to provide individuals trying to overcome homelessness and addiction with hands-on training in specialized, transferable employment skills that range from commercial painting to landscaping and carpentry. WFH’s work crews have beautified every single one of Chula Vista’s City Parks (72 in total), including restroom repainting, signage upgrades, gazebo restoration, picnic area revivals, and weed abatement. Demand for the program far outpaces available openings and in only four years since its launch, 168 individuals have participated in the program and 147 have achieved long-term housing and employment. We encourage other cities to take note of this lifesaving and life-changing program and consider implementing similar programs and partnerships.

2. **La Mesa’s youth homelessness collaboration**

A once decrepit hotel in the city of La Mesa was generating more than 2 complaint calls per day to law enforcement about illegal and questionable activities including drugs and prostitution. New ownership renovated and then leased all 60 rooms to three different youth homeless service providers so that as many as 85 youth suffering from homelessness could have a safe place to stay. The service providers closely collaborate to manage the property and aid the youth, and the City of La Mesa has seen a significant reduction in complaint calls as well as youth homelessness. Additionally, the City of La Mesa is committed to supporting this model and looking to replicate it. Thus far the effort has helped 105 youth and led to permanent housing for 35 youth, with an additional 40 currently employed or in school. We applaud the hotel owner, City of La Mesa, Urban Street Angels, San Diego Youth Services, and Home Start for this collaboration which can be replicated elsewhere in the county.

3. **County of San Diego’s funding for shelters & the Cities who pursued it**

San Diego County’s commitment to make $10 million available to all 18 cities throughout San Diego County to increase shelters provided much-needed funds to add urgently-needed beds. The cities of San Diego, Oceanside, and Vista pursued and secured these funds because of their plans to add immediately available beds. Additionally, because the County of San Diego made an underutilized parking lot available in the Midway District, a 150-bed mental health bridge shelter was opened in September of this year. Similarly, the city of Oceanside is converting a shuttered high school into a shelter. Activating underutilized government properties as these jurisdictions are doing is critical, cost-effective, and timely, and other cities and elected officials should follow suit.

The inaugural Shipwrecks are as follows:

1. **Chula Vista’s Failure to add much-needed shelter**

In May of 2020, The City of Chula Vista publicly announced its plans to add a shelter by using one of the Lucky Duck Foundation’s sprung structures, which can urgently provide temporary housing for 150 to 200 people experiencing homelessness. Tragically, after taking possession of this very valuable asset, they stored the shelter for more than 14 months. Ultimately the City of Chula Vista changed its mind and decided it did not want a bridge shelter, effectively preventing hundreds if not thousands of individuals from benefiting from the shelter while it was in storage.
It wasn’t until more than two years later that the City actually broke ground on its shelter site. While a bridge shelter could have provided nearly 200 beds nightly, the City indicates it will open 66 pallet homes in January of 2023. Although this will help, taking more than 2.5 years to add 66 pallet homes is nowhere near the urgency or speed required to meaningfully address the region’s homelessness crisis.

2. City of San Diego’s record-setting unsheltered homelessness
Since 2012, the Downtown San Diego Partnership has conducted a monthly count of unsheltered homeless individuals. During six of the last ten months, the count has reached new record highs, including an all-time high of 1,704 in November of 2022. Additionally, the count of homeless individuals on the streets of downtown has exceeded 1,000 people for 18 out of the last 19 months. The last time their count exceeded 1,000 people in a month was December of 2017, just ahead of the Hepatitis-A outbreak and crisis, which resulted in the deaths of 20 San Diegans. The sharp and ongoing increases in unsheltered homelessness in the heart of San Diego County is entirely unacceptable and has resulted in a public health and public safety crises. Downtown is arguably the epicenter of tourism, business, conventions, civic events and other activities and reducing homelessness and criminal behavior in this area is imperative for a myriad of reasons. A record-high alone is a shipwreck; record-high numbers in six of the last ten months is a tragedy and catastrophe of epic proportions. This sharp increase in unsheltered homelessness and subsequent illegal and dangerous activity has created daily unsafe and harmful circumstances for those who work, live or visit downtown. For example, the Youth Assistance Coalition is located downtown and aids hundreds of homeless youth every year who are trying to overcome homelessness. Instead, the youth they serve have been put in harm’s way due to limited public safety and sharp increases in unsheltered homelessness and criminal behavior immediately surrounding its building.

3. Homeless deaths, drug & fentanyl use, and persistent criminal activity
Nearly 500 unsheltered people died on the streets in the last year, including 113 unsheltered people who died in San Diego City due to fentanyl overdose. Five years ago, the number of homeless fentanyl deaths was two. While the Executive order signed by San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria to provide stronger enforcement may help, the number of deaths and overdoses is heartbreaking and reinforces the need to provide significantly more immediate and lifesaving pathways off the streets. It also reinforces the critical need to have a coordinated plan and effort across local, state and federal organizations to dramatically improve our regions efforts to reduce homelessness. This includes meaningfully more shelter beds, compassionate but accountable intervention and enforcement along with urgently needed services. The enforcement must include efforts to reduce criminal behavior including but not limited to drug and sex trafficking and the use of fentanyl and other illegal and deadly substances. Although the City of San Diego has said it intends to use the Old Library to add 25-30 beds, the City can’t “nibble” at the issue by adding only 25 to 30 beds when the old library can easily handle significantly more. Bureaucratic delays due to environmental reviews and other factors is akin to stating people are better off living on the streets.

While these Shamrocks don’t call out every important and productive effort being taken, nor is the list of Shipwrecks comprehensive, we call on all regional elected officials to aggressively take action to reduce homelessness and the current humanitarian, public safety and health crises.
We encourage San Diegans to participate in the ongoing effort of Shamrocks & Shipwrecks by visiting https://www.luckyduckfoundation.org/ to share their experiences and feedback on their elected leaders, join our mailing list, volunteer and donate.

ABOUT THE LUCKY DUCK FOUNDATION

Since 2005, The Lucky Duck Foundation (LDF) has raised funds and awareness for numerous charitable causes throughout San Diego. In 2017, due to the growing homelessness epidemic, LDF pivoted to focus on providing aid and relief for individuals and families suffering from homelessness. Since then, LDF and its co-founders, Pat & Stephanie Kilkenny, have funded, activated, and led several high-impact programs that alleviate the suffering of homelessness throughout San Diego County, including bridge shelters, employment and job training, research, permanent supportive housing, outreach, and more. Originally called the AGIA Foundation (Arrowhead General Insurance Agency), the name was changed to the Lucky Duck Foundation to honor the Kilkenny family's Irish heritage and as a nod to their love of the University of Oregon. The premise is simple: if you have had some good luck and fortune in your life, share your luck with those less fortunate. And, all donations are matched by Pat & Stephanie, up to $1.5 million per year.

Follow the Lucky Duck Foundation on social: Instagram | Facebook | Twitter | LinkedIn

For media inquiries, contact Drew Moser: drewm@luckyduckfoundation.org / (619) 417-1149.

# # #