

Walk With Us

Taking Back the Streets of Skid Row Requires a Community Effort

BY ESTELA LOPEZ

A few weeks ago, for the first time ever, social service providers and formerly homeless individuals took to the streets alongside law enforcement,

GUEST OPINION

business and property owners to clean up Skid Row. One hundred strong we marched to show that drug activity and the criminal element that it attracts to the area will no longer be tolerated.

Why should this matter to you? Because if you are our neighbor — whether you live in the lofts, condos and apartments throughout South Park, the Financial District, the Historic Core and Fashion District, or in the single room occupancy buildings in Skid Row — you are part of a larger Downtown community, all of which will benefit when the streets of Central City East are safe.

You will also be making history. Never before have the Central City East Association (CCEA), the Midnight Mission, Union Rescue Mission, many other social service providers, formerly homeless individuals and families living in and around Skid Row joined forces in an effort to fight for a common goal.

We all want sidewalks that are free of criminal behavior. We want our community to be

safe, the same as any other community in Los Angeles does. Now, we are united, and we want to extend an invitation to all of you who live, work and are stakeholders Downtown to make this an even larger coalition, all fighting for the same quality of life for Downtown that other L.A. neighborhoods enjoy. Our next Skid Row Neighborhood Watch walk is this Wednesday, Aug. 3, at 6 p.m. beginning at the Midnight Mission at Sixth and San Pedro streets.



The monthly walks are organized by CCEA and the Midnight Mission in response to the growing narcotics use and sales in and around the area. The problem was put in stark relief when residents of the San Pedro House, fed up with the worsening drug scene at their doorstep, raised their voices.

Built by the Skid Row Housing Trust, San Pedro House is for people transitioning off the streets. These residents are desperately trying to turn their lives around amidst the chaos on the sidewalks where they themselves once lived. City Councilwoman Jan Perry, who represents a large portion of Downtown, observed, “Nearly \$90 million of public funds have been invested in Central City East to create safe, affordable, extremely low income housing available for thousands of residents living with disabilities. They, as much as anyone else, deserve to live in an environ-

ment that is safe, clean and productive.”

Groups usually perceived as being adversarial are now in agreement that the situation in Skid Row has reached dangerous new levels. Drug use and sales, prostitution and other crimes are taking place on sidewalks day and night. Business owners and their employees

City East makes it difficult for service providers to help people get back on the road to self-sufficiency. How can we assist those who need and deserve our help when they must live each day in an environment of fear and intimidation?

For the first time in history we have a strong united front to clean up these streets. We need to give credit where credit is due: to the non-profit agencies whose efforts on behalf of the homeless are giving hope and support and the promise of a new future; to their clients, people working hard to transition off the streets and get their lives back on track; to the members of CCEA, local property owners who have been working for two decades to create a safe and clean environment throughout the eastern Downtown area; and to the LAPD, working tirelessly to rid the area of the criminal element that it attracts.

Now we need more. We need our neighbors to say “we won’t tolerate it anymore,” and to join us in a neighborhood walk that will include all of the parties mentioned above (among them, more than two dozen police officers). We need you, our neighbors and partners in Downtown Los Angeles, to walk with us.

For information on joining the Aug. 3 Neighborhood Watch walk, call (213) 228-8484. Secure parking is in the Midnight Mission’s underground garage at 601. S. San Pedro St.

Estela Lopez is the executive director of the Central City East Association.

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walk a gauntlet-type environment to and from work. Social service providers see their clients walk out of rehab classes and get swept up into old habits. In just one week alone the Midnight Mission lost 11 men to the streets.

The Neighborhood Watch walks are a supportive part of an LAPD effort to clean up the criminal element in Skid Row. According to Captain Andrew Smith, commanding officer of LAPD’s Central Area, the proliferation of narcotics in Central

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