

The Mercury News

[Harasz: Progress impressive in ending veterans' homelessness](#)

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PUBLISHED: November 10, 2016 at 9:20 am | UPDATED: November 10, 2016 at 1:16 pm

A year ago today, San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo, Santa Clara County Supervisor Dave Cortese, the county's Housing Authority and Destination: Home launched "All the Way Home," an unprecedented community-wide campaign designed to end veteran homelessness in Santa Clara County.

"All the Way Home" aligns community organizations to expand the supply of safe, affordable housing for homeless veterans.

As we honor all of the men and women who have served in our nation's military on this Veterans Day, I am pleased to report on our campaign's progress at the one-year mark.

Santa Clara County has among the highest number of unsheltered veterans in the nation. Our 2015 point-in-time census counted 703 veterans living on our streets, along our creeks and in shelters. Veterans experiencing homelessness are more likely to live on the street than in shelters and often remain on the street for extended periods. Given this county's 4 percent vacancy rate and sky-high rental prices, even veterans with federal housing vouchers have been unable to find landlords willing to rent to them.

When our campaign launched, the County authorized \$1.5 million annually for housing and homeless services for homeless veterans, and the City dedicated \$3 million to reconstruct its Vermont House property, which will provide 16 homes for veterans this coming summer.

The Housing Authority has up to \$7.5 million available annually to pay rental assistance for veteran families through the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program. We've committed \$187,000 a year in VASH funds toward operating the Vermont House — a long-term funding commitment that will support veterans for years to come.

Our community's faith-based groups are generating grassroots awareness of veterans' housing issues, including finding landlords and providing the kind of support to veterans that government can't. On the corporate side, Lockheed Martin is the first Fortune 100 company in Silicon Valley to support the campaign with a three-year commitment of \$10,000 per year.

Soon San Jose will release \$2.5 million as part of an initiative to provide rehabilitation funds for landlords willing to rent to homeless veterans. Together, we've spearheaded a regional landlord incentive program to identify permanent housing and landlords willing to work with homeless veterans.

County funding has paid incentives to landlords renting to homeless veterans, including a "gratitude" bonus of up to \$1,500, up to \$1,000 toward re-renting vacancy gaps and payment of security deposits. Already 148 veteran households have benefited from this program's success, and we've asked the County for additional money so it can continue.

With a dedicated consortium of service providers and our local Veterans Affairs ensuring every veteran makes the transition to housing, "All the Way Home" has housed 510 formerly homeless veterans, 264 of whom are using VASH vouchers.

Of the newly housed vets with VASH vouchers, 96 percent have maintained their housing. We've added 118 new landlords to our growing list, and as of October, we have an average of 43 vets moving from the street to a home every month.

While all of this is great news, there are still 101 veterans with VASH vouchers searching for landlords willing to rent under the VASH Section 8 program, and hundreds more still experiencing homelessness every night.

Our goal is ending veteran homelessness by the Veterans Day centennial in 2018; our success this first year shows us that together, we can meet this audacious goal. But we need to keep our momentum going. We've made great progress in bridging the financial gap between federal assistance and market rents, but we need more landlords willing to rent to our veterans. To find out how you can help, go to www.AllTheWayHomeCampaign.org.

Katherine Harasz is executive director of the Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara. She wrote this for The Mercury News.