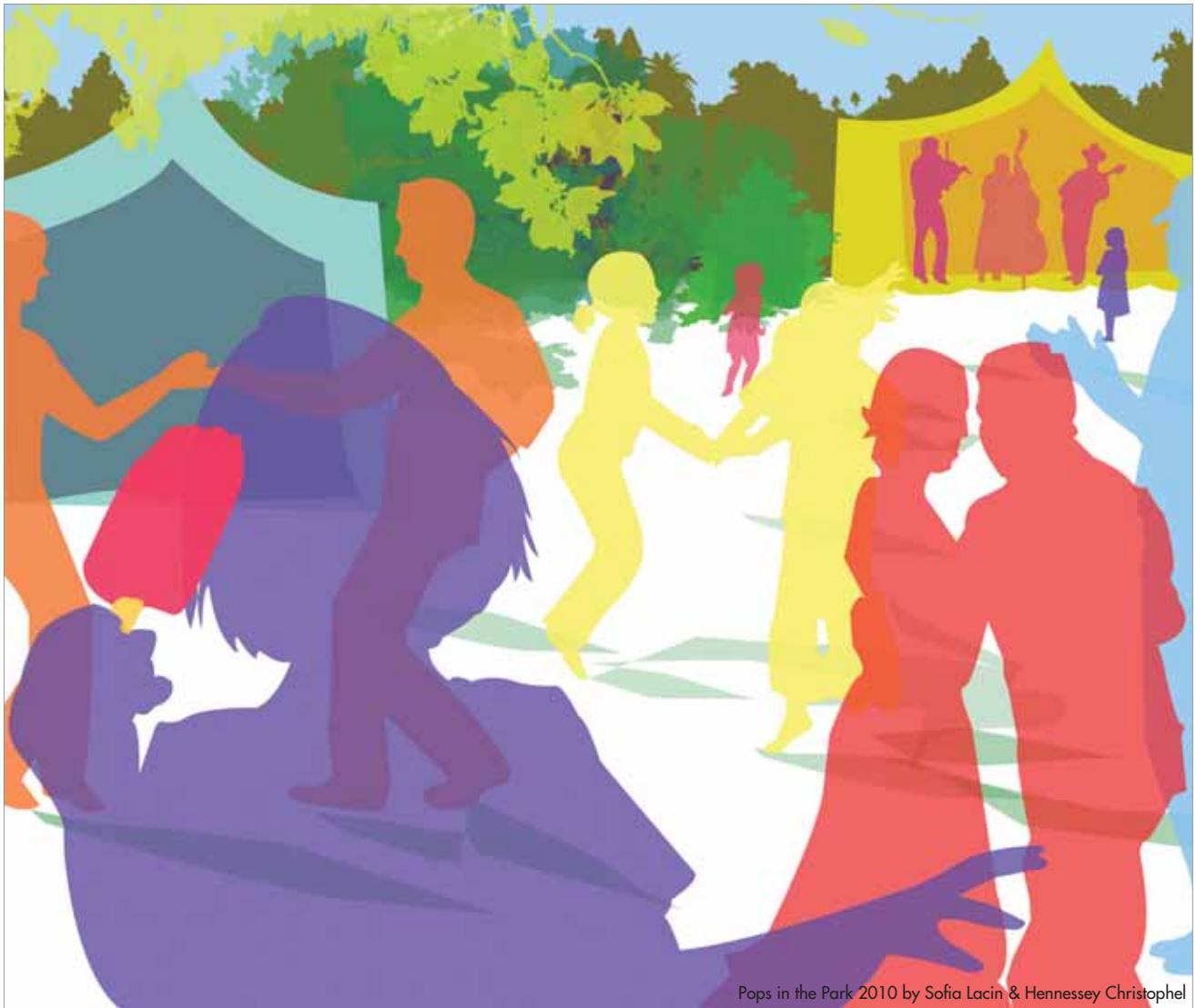


June 2010

INSIDE EAST SACRAMENTO



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GET INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Beacon of Hope

Bishop Quinn celebrates a lifetime of helping others



By Terry Kaufman
Local Heroes

Imagine a place that can take people from homelessness, joblessness, drug addiction and desperation and turn them into stable, productive and contributing members of society. It may sound like a magic trick, but it is the real-life work of the staff, volunteers and benefactors of Sacramento's Cottage Housing, one of the most successful programs of its kind in the country. More than 80 percent of Cottage Housing participants graduate to lives of sobriety and self-fulfillment, increasing employment rolls by more than 300 percent and reducing welfare dependence by almost half.

Fittingly, the 60 cottages that make up the project's flagship site are the Bishop Francis Quinn Cottages. Now retired, the former head of Sacramento's Catholic diocese was one of the visionaries who, more than two decades ago, believed that people were not homeless by choice and that they could, with support and guidance, turn their lives around. "Mayor Serna and I gave our support to the people who were starting the cottages," recalls Quinn, who appears with the late Mayor Joe Serna in



Bishop Francis Quinn

a 1993 photograph of the cottage ribbon-cutting ceremony in front of City Hall. "I never expected that it would be as successful as it has been, but it really is proof that people can

pull themselves up by their own bootstraps."

On June 30, Bishop Quinn will be honored at Crest Theatre with a Beacon of Hope award for his lifetime

of achievement and, especially, for his dedication to the residents of Cottage Housing. The event will celebrate not just the incredible success of Cottage Housing but also the 30th anniversary of Quinn's arrival in Sacramento and the 65th anniversary of his ordination as a Catholic priest.

"Teaching school was the toughest job I ever had," he says. "There I was, 24 years old with 40 teenage boys in a classroom. Everything after that was a piece of cake!"

Much has changed, in both the Catholic and secular worlds, since Quinn's 1946 ordination. "We were very closed in, very insular," says Quinn about the church of his youth. "Then, in the 1960s, we had the Vatican Council. It was a tumultuous time in this country and also in the church. The council changed the church radically, and it also changed each one of us." Appropriately, Quinn was at the epicenter of some of that tumult: He earned his doctorate in education at UC Berkeley in 1962, on the cusp of the campus free-speech movement.

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He immediately put that education degree to use at Catholic high schools in San Mateo and San Francisco. "Teaching school was the toughest job I ever had," he says. "There I was, 24 years old with 40 teenage boys in a classroom. Everything after that was a piece of cake!" The experience served Quinn well as he moved his way up in the church hierarchy. "I learned to be patient, long-suffering and tough," he quips.

One of the changes brought about by Vatican II was a new openness to and cooperation with people of other faiths, a move that Quinn championed during his tenure as bishop. He broke new ground with his recognition of women's role in the church, his compassion toward AIDS victims and his acceptance of responsibility for the church's historic persecution of Native Americans. Upon retirement, Quinn moved to Arizona and spent 13 years as a parish priest for the Yaqui tribe near Tucson. "I could choose whatever I wanted to do when I retired," he says. "I had never had a chance to meet Native Americans, so that's what I chose to do."

Now 88 years old, Quinn serves as parish priest to the residents of Mercy McMahon Terrace, a seniors' residence in East Sacramento that he calls home. But he is also a regular presence at Loaves & Fishes, where he helps serve meals to the homeless, as well as at Quinn Cottages, where faces light up as he makes his rounds. The cottage graduation ceremony is an event he looks forward to each year. "When I go out for the graduation, I'm really impressed by the people who have made something of their lives," he says. "These are people who may never have had a driver's license, and now they have a license, they own a car and they have a job."

Pointing to the dramatic changes made within the Catholic Church by Vatican II, Quinn asserts that it is time for a new council, this one dedicated to looking at human sexuality and its intersection with religion. The new council, he says, should involve the entire Catholic community as well as people of other faiths. "So many of the issues

that Catholics deal with—divorce, homosexuality, premarital sex—center around sexuality and affect how they connect with the church," he notes. "We need to move beyond this circular logic and look at what is really happening in people's lives."

Asked what he would like most to be remembered for, Quinn doesn't hesitate: "That I tried to follow the teachings of the Gospel." He reflects for a moment, then adds, "My

personal crest says these words: 'Love God, love one another.'" A fitting summation for an exceptional life.

The Beacon of Hope event on June 30 will benefit the expansion of programs at Cottage Housing. It will be from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. at Crest Theater, 1013 K Street. For sponsorship and ticket information, call 971-1566 x13 or e-mail beaconofhope@cottagehousing.org. ●

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