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FEATURED

Englewood groups hold vigil for homeless, others lost

Community remembers loved ones

By ELAINE ALLEN-EMRICH STAFF WRITER

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A few people left painted rocks with a message to those lost in the past year.

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ENGLEWOOD — Just because someone was homeless or died of COVID-19 doesn't mean they shouldn't be remembered with dignity.

Bonnie Saxman and Cindy Voortman, founders of On the Spot Aid, recently held a vigil at Indian Mound Park in Englewood to celebrate the lives of those lost this year.

The pair formed On the Spot Aid Inc. during the early days of the pandemic, after they treated dozens of homeless in need.



Makeshift memorials are created throughout the area to remember homeless and others lost.

PHOTOS PROVIDED

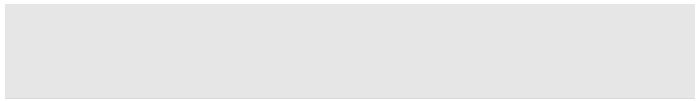
Then, over the summer, they realized it was important to honor those who died and help bring some closure for those who couldn't attend funerals of loved ones.

They thought a community vigil would help.

“Speaking the names of loved ones lost gives the ability to share losses with survivors,” Saxman said.

“Our community has experienced these losses, and many have lost loved ones in places they were unable to travel to for funerals and memorial services. COVID-19 has taken the lives of many. It's touched nearly everyone. Knowing that you're not alone in your grieving is yet





Englewood baker Connie Smoot stands near the cake she made for the recent vigil at Indian Mound Park.

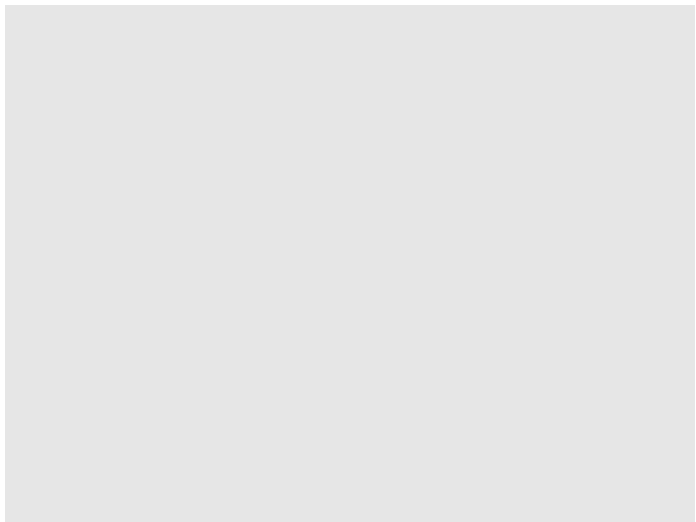
PHOTO PROVIDED

another aspect of living on the streets that many of us don't think about.”

On the Spot Aid Inc. teamed with Elsie Quirk Library, Englewood Community Care Clinic, Englewood Helping Hand, and Jesus Loves You Ministry for the memorial vigil during a Tuesday night community dinner for the homeless.

“We read the names of those we have lost and provided an open mic time for people to share and reflect together,” Voortman said.

“The community in Englewood has had its share of personal loss this past year. Friends, family and camp mates have passed away or moved on to different places. What our camper friends have not had, is the opportunity to acknowledge their losses, speak the names of those that matter and celebrate their lives. It was a special time of remembrance,” she said. “We are so grateful to all the organizations that stepped up and leaned in with love and support including Connie Smoot, who made a beautiful cross cake; Steve McAllister, Phoenix Rising of Englewood, and so many more.”



There was lots of food at the recent vigil at Indian Mound Park in Englewood.

PHOTOS PROVIDED

Saxman and Voortman, who quit their full-time jobs to focus on street medicine, say they will continue traveling to homeless camps, park benches, mobile showers and food giveaways to treat homeless people's wounds.

Saxman, a nurse who worked in the medical field for 20 years doing



vaccines and triage in disaster relief teams, teamed with Voortman, a health care lobbyist turned paramedic four years ago.

They say something as simple as a bug bite can quickly become infected for a homeless person. If the person is hospitalized and can't pay any of his medical bills, it's taxing on the medical care system.

Two local women provide first aid to people on the streets of Englewood, North Port, Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda. They also worked to bring a mobile shower to Englewood. They eat with the homeless at Indian Mound Park in Englewood.

This summer, they gave COVID-19 vaccines to protect the homeless who wanted them.

Saxman said it's not as easy to tell homeless people they should wash their hands before applying ointment, or they should keep their wound clean and dry because they don't have shelter or places where they can keep wound care supplies dry during the rainy season.

So, On the Spot gives out wound-care kits to help people continue treating cuts or infections.

They also refer homeless people to the Englewood Community Care Clinic for additional treatment. They give rides when needed, including to a woman who needed follow-up care in Tampa.

The pair is looking for a place to treat the homeless after surgery or a hospital stay. Currently, On the Spot pays for the homeless to stay in hotels while recovering.

“We do stuff remotely and noticed that when a person gets out of the hospital, they are still pretty sick,” Saxman said. “If someone is suffering from the flu and

ends up in the hospital with pneumonia, they may still be pretty sick when they are released.

“Legally a hospital can’t discharge people to homelessness, but it happens,” Saxman said. “We want a place where people can have respite for several more days before going back to their living conditions.”

Having a respite temporary care center for homeless people in the South County will prevent reinfections, other medical problems and longer hospital stays, Saxman said.

“It could even save a life,” she said.

For more information about On the Spot Aid, call 941-499-4664 or email onthespotaid@gmail.com, visit www.onthespotaid.com or [message them on Facebook](#).

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"Knowing that you're not alone in your grieving is yet another aspect of living on the streets that many of us don't think about."

Bonnie Saxman, co-founder of On The Spot, a nonprofit that medically treats homeless on the streets.

