

from May 3-5, which drew people from across the West Coast together for an event meant to support organizers, activists and encampment survivors while exploring ways to create and promote social change. Local Greens' support of \$50 toward people having a legal, safe place to sleep the night after the Summit if needed was all the more significant because it came just after an election, which always empties party coffers.

That was pretty sweet, from my point of view. They even outdid that, when Green voters approved a resolution that details a rationale and strategy to overturn the sleeping ban and join the struggle to expose and reverse public criminalization policies and practices aimed at destroying homeless peoples' presence in Santa Cruz County.

Thomas Leavitt, a well-informed Green Party advocate, did the lion's share of recent networking through the long impasse over the sleeping ban. Without Leavitt's persistence and willingness to deal with every individuals' concerns, the radical shift might not have occurred.

Leavitt comes from a strong grassroots history supportive of homeless folks. At 16, he helped forge a coalition "with other

local community activists and citizens, including several homeless individuals who presented a proposal to the Santa Monica City Council, that we developed completely independent of input from politicians. This was to create a 'Washers, Showers and Lockers' program (named SWASHLOCK), which still operates today."

Leavitt and his allies, including homeless folks, were able to manifest common-sense programs back in 1988. Significantly, SWASHLOCK got its relevance from connecting with people who were surviving homelessness. Today, the same basic approaches are necessary.

Leavitt's persistence and patience, and his working excessive hours, were key factors that helped turn the hardest corners here, as active Greens began to learn how to be policy makers on behalf of homeless folks in Santa Cruz.

The next step is action. As Leavitt said at the Right To Sleep Summit, "Too many of us are focused on our narrow activist niches, and never break out of them to form broader coalitions that can effect systemic change." Greens in Santa Cruz have broken out now; California Greens may follow and break through ideological blockages and activate the body politic.

April's Green Party resolution on homelessness can be used in many forums to help make the point that there are other allies — not just those who are already broken or criminalized for being homeless people — who are willing to actively change things. Housed people have joined in this commitment now to change how "their" government and its dependent agencies treat homeless people — and to confront how ordinary folks turn their eyes away, and to confront whatever forms of denial people cling to in bewilderment or arrogance or just plain bigotry.

In Santa Cruz County, this resolution represents approximately 5,000 Green voters who are committed now to decriminalizing homelessness, as directed by our state Green Party platform. We've disabled a deadly taboo simply by speaking loud enough to be heard. However many voices it requires to make social change are already, urgently, here.

I believe this timely decision may travel through many counties, even other states, ignited as Truth sometimes becomes by our shared need for dignity and our birthright as human beings together. I join with my peers, survivors of homelessness, and my fellow Green voters, in calling for this long overdue "sea change" in public policy.

Go save the ancient redwoods, yes, and all at-risk marine animals; save sustainable jobs, the water and shore and mountains, yes. Go forth fast, and reclaim this government, once "of, by and for the people." But ensure the survival of the poorest human beings among us, too.

My girlfriend Patrice Maxfield said before she died, after earthquake-related homelessness destroyed her family and home, "There is no excuse in a nation so wealthy for even one person to die of (hypothermia or) hunger." Yet it happens in spades every day all across the nation.

Let the hierarchy of privilege topple as soon as it will. Take the poisons and engineered unknowns out of our foods and begin to walk where once you drove. With each and every step, save the people, too.

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