



A BUS travels between the Baltimore, left, and the King Edward, two hotels for homeless people owned by AIDS Healthcare Foundation.

A TIMES INVESTIGATION

AIDS charity’s move into housing sees rhetoric clash with conditions

By Liam Dillon, Doug Smith and Benjamin Oreskes

After her eviction, Alisha Lucero returned to her apartment to find her belongings thrown away.

Gone were Lucero’s passport and her recently deceased brother’s high school letter jacket. Lucero said she couldn’t get into her car because her landlord, the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, had trashed her keys. She was wearing the only clothes she had left.

For the next two years, Lucero lived on the streets where she said she was raped and beaten while her mental health spiraled. At times, Lucero slept in a tent steps from her former residence, the Madison in Skid Row.

“What they did to me was unjust, was brutal, was inhumane,” said Lucero, 44, speaking about her eviction. “They literally ruined my life.”

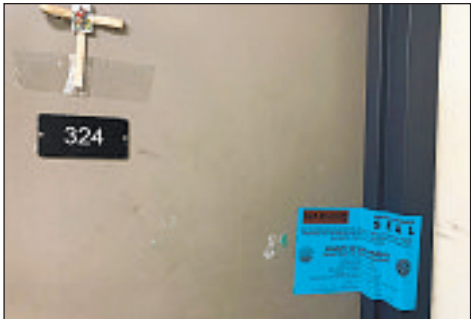
The foundation evicted Lucero and scores of other tenants in disputes over unpaid rent. At the same time, it was making public statements about the dangers of forcing people from their homes. On social media during the COVID-19 pandemic’s darkest days, the foundation put the stakes bluntly.

“Evictions kill,” the foundation said.

Such contradictions between the AIDS Healthcare Foundation’s vocal pro-tenant advocacy and the harsh conditions depicted by its residents have characterized the charity’s six-year foray into providing housing. With \$2.2 billion in annual revenue drawn largely from its pharmaceutical business, the Los Angeles-based global AIDS nonprofit has transformed itself into one of [See **Housing**, A10]



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LEFT: a hot plate at the Baltimore. Middle: a sealed room at the Madison after a death. Right: roach droppings at the Baltimore.

Workers dying of disease linked to silica dust

Physicians blame outbreak of silicosis, which is preventable, on a boom in demand for engineered stone.

By Emily Alpert Reyes and Cindy Carcamo

When Wendy Solano first heard the word “silicosis,” her husband Jose Raul Garcia Leon was already suffering from the incurable disease that would kill him.

After immigrating from Mexico, the father of three had provided for his family by cutting countertops. His illness began as a dry cough — something the couple had chalked up to allergies or the changing weather — and rapidly became so debilitating that he grew exhausted trying to speak, Solano said.

Leon died months after joining the waitlist for a lung transplant. Near the end, he could no longer speak, his lungs irreparably damaged by the pale dust that coated his clothes and head when he returned from work.

He was 46 years old.

The deaths of workers like Leon, some barely at middle age, have alarmed California lawmakers and regulators, as dozens of cases of the suffocating illness have emerged among people who cut and grind countertops. Physicians have linked the silicosis outbreak to the booming demand for engineered stone, a synthetic material much higher in lung-scarring silica than natural granite or marble.

Yet the threat of silicosis is far from a new one, known for centuries as a hazard to workers breathing in tiny particles of crystalline silica. And more than a decade before Leon died, researchers had already raised alarms about the renewed threat of silicosis specifically among workers cutting engineered stone, which has surged in popularity since the turn of the century.

[See **Silicosis**, A15]

GOLDEN STATE

Even nonprofit care has a price

Many hospice workers worry that staffing shortages are affecting the quality of care.

STEVE LOPEZ

When my mother was dying, a private, for-profit hospice agency failed her — the assigned nurse was late for the first visit because of a staffing shortage. My mother suffered in misery without pain medication, and our family dumped the agency and switched to a nonprofit.

Karen Eshelman was the



nurse who came to the rescue, calmly and quickly adjusting the pain medication and compassionately preparing us for the inevitable. Grace Lopez died peacefully a couple of days later, just shy of 90.

Eshelman showed up at my mother’s funeral to pay her respects, and recently, almost five years later, I dropped by her home in Concord to say thanks.

“For a lot of us in hospice care, something happened in life that made us want to give back,” Eshelman told me in her kitchen, wearing her blue uniform as she got ready for another shift. She said she lost her first husband when she was 30, and with their two kids to care for, she had to learn how to confront death and move past it.

[See **Lopez**, A14]

Engineer shifts his focus to Gaza

He’s worked on Mars and lunar missions, but parents remain in war zone. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Mann lets loose with ‘Ferrari’

Director’s latest movie about Italian carmaker highlights our Holiday Preview. **CALENDAR, E1**



WALLY SKALIJ Los Angeles Times

UCLA PUTS AWAY USC

Trojans receiver Duce Robinson can’t find the handle on this pass as Bruins linebacker Ale Kaho defends in UCLA’s 38-20 win. **SPORTS, D1**

Weather

Mostly sunny.
L.A. Basin: 71/50. **B10**



Many rural Latino voters feel ignored

In California’s U.S. Senate election, some say the issues most important to them are being overlooked.

By Benjamin Oreskes

SALINAS, Calif. — Francisco Rios stood contently watching the whirl of a Taylor Farms lettuce packaging assembly line, which was about to be dismantled and shipped off to Arizona for the winter. He would not be far behind.

A father of two who migrated from Mexico nearly 40 years ago and started as a cauliflower picker in the Salinas Valley, Rios said politics has been far from his focus as he works on packing up the factory for the move

to Yuma.

“I don’t know any of these candidates,” he said when asked about California’s 2024 Senate race, “but I want one who believes in respect, liberty and equality.”

Many Latino voters in this corner of rural California believe politicians overlook them — perhaps more so than those living a little farther north in the Bay Area or down south in Los Angeles. Rios, who is now a safety supervisor, has always voted since becoming a citizen in 1998. He had heard Sen. Dianne Feinstein died, but had no idea who was running for her former seat even though one of the candidates, Rep. Adam B. Schiff, had just swung through town.

Candidates need to show up, campaign in Spanish and hone a message that [See **Latinos**, A9]



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