

South L.A. is getting people indoors

The area is a bright spot amid the city’s homelessness crisis, though even there the problem remains vast.

By Ruben Vives

A string of tents and makeshift shelters sat for years west of the I10 Freeway, across the street from an elementary school in the Vermont Vista neighborhood.

One day last February, workers cleared the encampment, which stretched about four blocks from Colden Avenue to Century Boulevard, moving dozens of people indoors.

Today, a single tent remains, along with about five people who live in a pedestrian tunnel under the freeway.

Longtime residents say the neighborhood is quiet again, and the sidewalks are clean.

“It was an ugly sight, but now things are better,” said Andrea Ceron, 59. “We still deal with other problems, like police chases and prostitution.”

South L.A. has been a rare bright spot amid the city’s homelessness crisis.

While homelessness has increased in other parts of the city, according to the annual point-in-time count conducted last January, South L.A. had 10% fewer unsheltered people than it did the previous year.

Officials and service providers attribute the drop to the hard work they have put in for years coming to fruition, with the help of funding infusions, in an area where most residents are Latino or Black and many live below the poverty line.

Mayor Karen Bass’ signature homelessness initiative, Inside Safe, has also made a dent, with more encampment cleanups in South L.A. — including the one in Vermont Vista — than in any other part of the city.

While Inside Safe has cleared long-standing encampments, most who lived in them are still in temporary housing or are back on the street. The problem remains vast, with nearly 13,000 unsheltered people in South L.A., according to the point-in-time count.

Bass took office in December 2022, so the progress made by Inside Safe isn’t re-

[See South L.A., A13]



CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times
ELAINE LEWIS, 72, who has lived on the streets for five years, speaks with Jaime Martinez and Karen McGee, ambassadors with 2nd Call, a South L.A. nonprofit. The area has seen a 10% decline in homelessness.



HUNTER BIDEN AND THE HOLLYWOOD DEAL MAKER

How wealthy entertainment attorney Kevin Morris joined forces with the president’s son to help him face a maelstrom of legal, financial and personal problems

By Matt Hamilton and Stacy Perman

On a fall day in 2019, one of Hollywood’s top lawyers drove through the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains to see Hunter Biden.

Biden’s life had reached a crucial point. His father was in a crowded primary field for the Democratic presidential nomination. The younger Biden had decamped to a poolside midcentury rental that looked out over the San Fernando Valley — newly sober, newly married and climbing out of the wreckage of years of crack and alcohol addiction with a daily ritual of painting.

After briefly meeting at a recent fundraiser, Kevin Morris arrived to view Biden’s art. They retreated to Biden’s kitchen table, where Morris posed a question: How are you doing?

The reply stretched over several hours.

Morris retrieved a legal pad from his car and took notes as Biden opened up. His life — already marred by the deaths decades ago of his mother and baby sister — had by then seemed an unstoppable calamity, starting with the more recent death of his brother, Beau, the depths of his crack addiction, the mounting alimony, the unpaid and unfiled taxes, the Arkansas woman who claimed he fathered her child, the escalating political attacks and more.

Together they made a list of things in Biden’s life that had to be tackled.

It was the beginning of an unlikely relationship that would confound and fascinate both Hollywood and Washington.

[See Hunter Biden, A10]

Biden photo: JOSE LUIS MAGANA AP; Morris photo: ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ Getty Images

A requiem for People’s Park

Half a century after its tumultuous birth, the storied open space in Berkeley may have seen its last day

By James Rainey, Jessica Garrison and Hannah Wiley

BERKELEY — Before the first shrubs and hunks of sod, before the saplings and the flower beds, before the folk art and anything-goes performance stage, People’s Park was an idea.

It would be an open space for open people, in the heart of this university town, birthed by 1960s radicals and nurtured by subsequent generations of freethinkers who believed in the notion that people would sustain and support one another, if only they had a place to gather.

The utopian ideal of People’s Park lived in

the hearts of many people in the decades after its 1969 founding, even as neglect and the lack of a cohesive vision saw the space devolve into the darker reaches wrought by homelessness, drug use and despair.

But the dream of a people-powered open space that answered to no powerful institution — least of all the grandees of the adjacent UC Berkeley campus — appears on the verge of collapse. Nearly 55 years after activists seized the park and declared it the people’s place, the university retook control of

[See People’s Park, A14]



CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times

SECOND FAMILY LOVES L.A.

Vice President Kamala Harris and Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff discuss their lives in a city filled with A-list celebrities. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Israeli writers in state of shock

Hamas’ attack on Oct. 7 is testing how novelists, filmmakers and TV writers will distill a tragedy. **WORLD, A4**

Evolutionary leap for mocktails

Kato’s dynamic drinks duo leads the way for next-level nonalcoholic cocktails and beverage pairings. **WEEKEND, L1**

Weather

Breezy morning. L.A. Basin: 60/40. **B10**



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