

# Santa Monica Daily Press

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THE TIME FOR HOOPS ISSUE

## COMMUNITY PROFILES KAREN DONOHO



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DONOHO

## Embracing major change

BY MELODY HANATANI  
Daily Press Staff Writer

**11TH STREET** Karen Donoho is embracing the changes to come over the next year, covering up everything below her neck to avoid disrespecting local customs, most likely dying her blonde locks to better blend in with the general population.

For the 49-year-old single mother of three adult children, the challenge of rebuilding the health care system in Iraq is worth the risks of being an American in a volatile country.

The Santa Monica resident and long-time American Red Cross volunteer departed on Friday to spend the next year in the Middle Eastern country, working with a team of paramedics and ER technicians to train hospital staff in critical care. Donoho, who is a nurse at Saint John's Health Center and Santa Monica UCLA Medical Center and Orthopaedic Hospital, will be part of the International Medical Corps' Emergency Medicine Program.

"I am one to go into a situation comfortable with the fact that there are people there to provide security for us," Donoho said last week. "I don't fear it."

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## SKY HIGH

Morgan Genser [news@smdp.com](mailto:news@smdp.com)

Santa Monica College's Arnette Hollis elevates to dunk the basketball during the Corsairs' home opener at SMC on Saturday night. SMC won the game, 89-78.

## Beverly Hills steps up to help homeless

BY ELIZABETH KENIGSBERG  
Special to the Daily Press

**BEVERLY HILLS** Hoping to reduce homelessness within its borders, the city of Beverly Hills has partnered with Step Up On Second, the Santa Monica-based nonprofit dedicated to helping homeless individuals cope with mental illnesses and find housing.

"Beverly Hills wants to encourage people who want assistance to use our services," Mayor Barry Brucker of Beverly Hills said. "Step Up On Second is a very well-respected organization with vast experience in providing housing for chronically homeless individuals. We're pleased to be partnering with them on this vital project."

Beverly Hills began its partnership with Step Up On Second about a year and a half ago, initially on a six-month trial basis. The partnership was recently approved by the Beverly Hills City Council, formalizing it within the city's homeless outreach program.

Since Step Up On Second has come to Beverly Hills, the organization has worked with the city's down and out to "try and build relationships with them, making contact with family members or to see if they're willing to go into a group home, homeless shelter or join a working environment so they don't have to live on the streets," Brucker said.

Step Up On Second has become well-known for helping serve Santa Monica's roughly 2,000 homeless people, operating as a recovery center for the chronically homeless, trying to provide long-term educational, social and work support.

"Outreach is the start of treatment, and hopefully a road to recovery and permanent housing," said Tod Lipka, CEO and executive director of Step Up on Second. "We've met with success in working with a few of these individuals [in Beverly Hills], and we hope to continue to grow the program."

Approximately 30 to 40 homeless people reside in Beverly Hills, according to city offi-

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# Iraq presents a new challenge for health care professional

FROM CP PAGE 1

The courage might come from her time working in disaster relief after Hurricane Katrina hit the southern part of the United States in 2005.

Donoho already had some experience working in natural disaster relief when she arrived in Florida on Aug. 29, 2005, having her first exposure the previous year with Tropical Storm Jeanne, spending several days in a hurricane proof school whose roof was blown off.

But the experience working with Jeanne would be a walk in the park compared to the multiple death threats, sleepless nights and dealings with mentally ill individuals that came inside a sweltering gym in Picayune, Miss.

"Katrina prepared me for anything in life," Donoho said. Three days after the hurricane hit, a team of five ARC volunteers arrived at a school in Picayune carrying supplies, unaware that what awaited them was a gymnasium filled with 500 people.

"When I got out of the car, someone ran up to me and said 'Are you a nurse?'" Donoho recalled. "I said I am a nurse ... and they said good, that one is dying, that one has a broken hip ... that one can't breathe, those people are diabetic."

The people in that building would go days without food, a week and a half without electricity, two weeks before portable toilets would come and four weeks before the gymnasium would cease becoming an impromptu disaster relief center.

It was a month in which Donoho was threatened with a gun at least twice, dealt with what she believed were more

than 25 mentally ill individuals, and comforted a woman who had just lost her husband two weeks before the storm and a cat to the hurricane.

Donoho was there until the gym closed and the last family had been moved into a mobile home.

"It was good closure for me because I was able to see closure to the shelter," she said.

Since then, Donoho, who is the chair of the ARC's Disaster Action Team, has responded to multiple wildfires and other incidents in the area. She spent the days leading up to her departure at the American Red Cross, saying goodbye to her colleagues and tying up loose ends.

"We're very proud," John Pacheco, the executive director of the American Red Cross, said. "She's one of the real heroes Santa Monica doesn't realize it has here."

An active volunteer in the community who is also involved with the Police Activities League and Santa Monica Fire Department, Donoho learned about the opportunity to go to Baghdad about nine months ago through a physician at the Santa Monica UCLA Medical Center who has been involved with the program.

It was only three weeks ago that Donoho had her final interview for the program and two weeks ago that her spot was finalized.

The time has gone in an exciting blur.

"This is going to be a completely new experience," she said.

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# Communities unite to help the homeless

FROM HOMELESS PAGE 1

cial. The program, which receives public funding under California's Mental Health Services Act, which was passed under Proposition 63 in 2004, aims to provide the homeless — many of whom are believed to be mentally ill and living in public parks and other city spaces — services that will help find them housing and reintegrate the homeless into the community.

"The idea is not to push them out of our zip code," Brucker said about the Step Up On Second activities and the city's policy on dealing with the homeless. "The idea was to make sure that they're safe, not disturbing the neighbors, merchants, and visitors, while showing that the police and people from Step Up On Second are not to be a source of fear, but a conduit that understands and can address their needs and safety concerns."

Beverly Hills' involvement fits in with a more unified approach across Los Angeles in dealing with homelessness, one in which cities recognize it as a regional issue.

"There have been a lot of things that have created the momentum for this regional approach, and the idea of exporting the homeless to another city is no longer tolerable," Lipka said. "Cities have increasingly recognized that the homeless are citizens, and that we need to address their

needs and provide for their health and safety."

Jim Latta, who oversees the human services division in Beverly Hill, said supporting the homeless throughout Los Angeles and taking them off the street has become one of six agenda items within his department.

"The city of Beverly Hills has been closely dealing with the issue of homelessness and has become more involved in working with other regional players," Latta said, who began working for the city over the course of last year. "Our initial goal was to just remove one homeless person off the street and help them attain shelter, but over the year we've had 1,200 contacts, with 160 different individuals, working closely with individuals, addressing whatever their needs are."

Brucker said Step Up On Second has been able to accomplish the task of establishing several "mutually beneficial" relationships over the last year and a half with the city's homelessness, exceeding the city's expectations of the program.

"It is truly a very successful program for us," Brucker said. "We have heard that several people [Step Up On Second] has established relationships with have been reunited with their families, others have decided to get off the streets and go into shelters and to begin the process of rebuilding their lives, and are starting to become aware of the opportunities to reshape their lives."

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