



Santa Monica Daily Press

GUILTY AS CHARGED?
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THE JUST A MATTER OF TIME ISSUE

A fresh start to a better life

BY MELODY HANATANI
Daily Press Staff Writer

DOWNTOWN The episodes began shortly after high school for Davon Williams, struggling to distinguish the real from the delusions.

For a young man still trying to find his place in the world, the diagnosis of schizophrenia felt devastating, bringing much confusion and doubt.

At 19 years old, an age when many begin dreaming about their careers, Williams questioned whether he could even lead a normal life.

Four years later, the Los Angeles resident is studying for a career in the medical field and holding a steady job cashiering at the Fresh Start Cafe on Second Street.

It's work that takes up about 10 hours a week when school is in session, 24 hours when it is not, involving training new employees and running the front counter at the small market/cafe. While it does not directly pertain to the medical profession, Williams understands his experiences today will open doors in the future.

Such is the goal of Step Up on Second's Fresh Start program, which takes the organization's members who suffer from mental illnesses and puts them to work, washing dishes, preparing food and selling merchandise, all with the hope they will graduate onto jobs in the community.

"They've helped me build my resume by teaching me things I need to know ... to go out into the working world," Williams said.

Step Up on Second, a nonprofit that provides mental health services, founded the program 15 years ago to provide vocational training for its members, helping them develop the skills necessary to transition back into the community.

They start in the back room washing dishes, eventually moving their way to bulk prep cook where they spend their days cutting three cases of potatoes into French fries and other vegetables. The next step takes the program participants on to fresh prep where

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WORKING IT: Ahmad Raza of Step Up On Second's Fresh Start Program assists a customer Friday morning at the Fresh Start Cafe located on Second Street. Raza spends about nine hours a week at Fresh Start where he works as a cashier. He occasionally takes computer courses at Santa Monica College on the side, hoping to apply technical skills to a new job some day.

May your shopping be merry and safe

BY MELODY HANATANI
Daily Press Staff Writer

DOWNTOWN 'Tis the season for shoppers to be merry and wary.

As consumers begin working through their holiday to-do lists, authorities are warning of costly dangers that come during the hustle and bustle of December madness.

"There have been changes in the economy where people need to be careful with their money," Eda Suh, the Santa Monica deputy city attorney, said. "We think people should be more protective of how they spend their limited resources."

With the increasing number of national chain stores going out of business, shoppers should be mindful when purchasing gift cards, which will be essentially worthless if the company declares bankruptcy, Suh said.

One of the most common mistakes made by consumers during the holidays is neglecting to check their receipts for possible overcharges. While shoppers are legally entitled to the lowest advertised or posted price for any item, stores often forget to update their system to reflect the proper amount.

"A lot of time people just aren't aware of it and once they are made aware of this, they start checking their receipts and find problems," said Ken Pellman, spokesman for the County of Los Angeles Department of Agricultural Commissioner/Weights and Measures.

Upon receiving complaints, the department conducts undercover check ups on the alleged offending business, purchasing random items to be sure the lowest marked price pops up on the register.

The mistakes are usually honest ones, Pellman said.

"There's a lot of temporary help during this time of year and a lot of sales and mark downs and sometimes things don't get changed when they should be," Pellman said.

But if there is a pattern of overcharges

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Big Blue Bus Community Meetings

Join us for a discussion on funding issues and how Big Blue Bus will allocate limited resources and improve timeliness on selected routes. Proposals include some schedule adjustments:

- Possible service adjustments to Lines 1, 3 & 6
- Possible reduction of service to Lines 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, the Tide Ride, the Sunset Ride
- Implementation of the new Beach Ride

Language interpretation and disability-related accommodation requests can be made by contacting Big Blue Bus Customer Service at least three business days prior to the meeting you wish to attend.

www.BigBlueBus.com
310-451-5444



Monday, December 8

- 6:00 – 8:00 pm
- Fairview Library, 2101 Ocean Park Blvd, Santa Monica
- Take Line 8

Tuesday, December 9

- 10:00 am – 12:00 noon
- Ken Edwards Center, Room 104, 1527 4th Street, Santa Monica
- Take Line 3, 4, 5, 9 or Tide Ride

Tuesday, December 9

- 6:00 – 8:00 pm
- Westside Pavilion, Room B, 3rd floor, 10850 W Pico Blvd (Landmark parking structure), Los Angeles
- Take Line 7, 8 or 12

Saturday, December 13

- 10:00 am – 12:00 noon
- SM Main Library, Multipurpose Room, 2nd floor, 601 Santa Monica Blvd, Santa Monica
- Take Line 1, 7, 8, 10 or Tide Ride

Program gives hope to individuals with mental illnesses

FROM WORKING PAGE 1

they make sandwiches and other items that are cooked every day.

The members then go on to work the grill before moving to the front of the house where they cashier and learn how to stock.

"They should be able to leave our program and pretty much function in and out," Amy Stone, the Fresh Start program director, said.

The program also includes a catering component.

Approximately 40 to 75 individuals participate in the program at any given time. Most are paid minimum wage.

The average member will spend about six to nine months in the program. About half will go out into jobs in the community and a smaller percentage will stick with their new positions for more than 90 days.

"Retention is the biggest stumbling block because people with mental illness diagnosis don't want to tell people," Stone said. "The voices come back and they skip work or get hospitalized and they're afraid to call their employers."

Some members have gone on to work in the restaurant industry successfully. Others have landed jobs in catering.

For 62-year-old Ahmad Raza, the program has inspired him to start anew.

Raza grew up in India and Pakistan and moved to Philadelphia in the 1970s when he attended Drexel University in Philadelphia and graduated with a masters in science and materials engineering. He later moved to Chicago

where he received his masters in business administration at Northwestern University.

He worked several years as a foundry engineer in Chicago and another few years in plant management for Chrysler before moving to Arizona where he was a financial planner and budget coordinator for a mining company. He was let go after eight months when signs of his bipolar condition began appearing.

Raza moved to California in the 1980s, working as a taxi driver and messenger along with other jobs. His mental disease soon began catching up with him and Raza ended up on the streets of Los Angeles.

It was after his arrest in Venice for starting a garbage fire that Raza, who was ordered by a judge to seek mental help, was diagnosed as being bipolar.

But Raza didn't accept the diagnosis, refusing medication.

It took 10 years, time on the streets, in jail and in mental health facilities, before Raza would fully come to terms with his condition.

Today Raza spends about nine hours a week at Fresh Start where he works as a cashier. He occasionally takes computer courses at Santa Monica College on the side, hoping to apply technical skills to a new job some day.

"It's given me hope and confidence that this is not the end," Raza said about his experience at Fresh Start. "I can keep on going and improve my skills,"

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Highest voter turnout since '68

FROM ELECTION PAGE 3

and their volunteers took 28 days to count and certify them all. They also had to account for all election supplies and equipment used during the election, and conduct an audit of all election returns.

"Activities associated with canvassing the election and certifying the returns are tedious and detailed," said Registrar-Recorder Dean Logan. "But they are essential to the transparency and accountability of the elections process."

Among the ballots processed and added during the post-election canvass period were:

- Vote by mail ballots received the day before or the day of the election. (NOTE: by law, all vote by mail ballots received by mail must be signature-verified prior to removal from envelopes for counting).

- Provisional ballots cast on Election Day by people whose names were not on the voter file or who appeared at a polling location other than the one noted on their voter registration record. These ballots required verification of each voter's eligibility prior to counting. (NOTE: 85 percent of provisional ballots were validated and counted).

- Ballots cast on Election Day, which had to be re-made and/or enhanced prior to counting primarily due to voters casting ballots outside of their assigned voting

precincts or due to torn/damaged ballots that could not be processed through the vote tabulation equipment.

- Ballots containing write-in votes for candidates not listed on the ballot that staff must manually verify prior to counting.

Out of 3,368,057 ballots cast in the election, 2,557,835 (or 75.94 percent) were cast at one of the county's 4,394 polling locations on Election Day.

"There were more ballots cast in total, more ballots cast by mail and more voters registered in Los Angeles County than in any prior election dating back to 1968," Logan said.

More than 600 regular and temporary Registrar-Recorder staff worked to accomplish the complex ballot counting and vote auditing tasks during the allotted 28-day period prior to this week's certification. Additionally, more than 25,000 volunteer pollworkers and precinct coordinators assisted voters on election day contributing to a well-run election.

"I would like to thank the more than 25,000 community members who gave of their time to serve the voters as pollworkers on Election Day," Logan said. "They are the cornerstone of our democracy and absolutely vital to the successful administration of elections in Los Angeles County."

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