

---

---

OPINION

---

---

# Homelessness among the high-rises

By John Kratzer  
and Kimberly Elliott

From the East Village to Little Italy, downtown San Diego has been revitalized. New businesses have started, old businesses are flourishing, and more people than ever before are calling downtown home.

Yet we are still faced with the ongoing challenge of another group of people who call downtown San Diego home. But rather than sleeping in a comfortable bed in a new high-rise condominium complex, these people seek refuge in cars, on cold sidewalks, in doorways or any place else that offers some semblance of safety for a few moments of rest.

Nearly 10,000 men, women and children are homeless in San Diego County every night, and with the city's homeless shelters closed until next winter, more will be sleeping on the streets in the months to come.

On Saturday, April 28, this important civic issue was brought into focus by "Sleepless in San Diego," a community sleep-out hosted by the San Diego Rescue Mission at the Community Concourse in front of City Hall. This event – bringing together churches, colleges and youth groups – increased public awareness of the challenge we face while raising much needed funds for the Mission, which has the most comprehensive, privately supported rehabilitation program in San Diego.

Chronic homelessness is a problem, but it's a problem we can do something about. That's why we participated in the

---

**Kratzer** is president and chief executive officer of JMI Realty and co-chair of Sleepless in San Diego. **Elliott** is senior vice president at The Corky McMillin Cos. and chair of the San Diego Rescue Mission board of directors.

Nearly 10,000 men, women and children are homeless in San Diego County every night, and with the city's homeless shelters closed until next winter, more will be sleeping on the streets in the months to come.

sleep-out along with hundreds of other San Diegans – to demonstrate our commitment to supporting programs that assist homeless people with housing and rehabilitation.

Last year, the San Diego City Council displayed courage by adopting the United Way's Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in the San Diego region and move toward the construction of permanent housing for the homeless. The city also deserves credit for reaching a compromise in February, agreeing not to ticket people for sleeping on public property from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. and turning the homeless into criminals.

Studies show that the most cost-effective way of dealing with the homeless is supportive housing. It costs less to house and provide rehabilitation services for homeless people than it costs to incarcerate them or continue handling them individually through emergency services.

For example, in the 1990s, a statewide study revealed that the Rescue Mission alone saved taxpayers about \$50 million a year because its residents did not end up in emergency rooms or the

county mental health system, nor were they defacing property or committing crimes. Since the Rescue Mission now houses about 400 people, daily, that savings is probably closer to \$60 million in 2007.

It's now up to all of us to see that these forward-thinking efforts are not wasted. Members of San Diego's private sector, including downtown business owners and property developers, routinely say that homelessness is one of their top concerns. Yet, the private sector has not provided much money in support of homeless initiatives. If we are to find a workable solution to the homeless problem, one that goes beyond enforcement, the private sector must participate.

Union Bank of California, The Corky McMillin Cos., JMI Realty, Sudberry Properties, Bank of America and 1st Pacific Bank sponsored the first sleep-out, creating a model that downtown businesses can emulate to combat this social ill. We call on other downtown businesses to join us in participating in this process, because we are among the largest beneficiaries. Moreover, we have access to capital and have connections to the people who can raise the funds to support programs for the homeless such as those at the Rescue Mission.

Businesses will see a positive return on investment, rather than continuing to funnel money into police protection and security coverage. For the community at large, it pays dividends through a reduced financial burden on emergency medical services, social service agencies, law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system.

And these programs allow the homeless to get off the streets, so they are no longer sleepless in San Diego.