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Downtown and the h-word



Brent Holmes

Merideth Spriggs of Caridad will speak at "Homeless for the holidays."

Nov 05, 2015 by [Andrew Kiraly](#)

When I say "downtown resident," who pops to mind? A bearded hipster, a fresh-faced Zapponista, a manic pixie dream barista? Maybe the iconic downtown denizen is a **man huddled in a blanket** in a dead storefront's doorway. A homeless man.

As the story of downtown continues to unfold, trudging two steps forward, one step back, it's largely been the story of the Downtown Project, and that's largely been a story about real estate, commerce and consumerism — what they've bought, what they're building, what they're betting their retail version of a downtowner will want to eat, drink, wear. Which is fine, if you think **the job of an urban core is to be a mall**. Beyond that glossy bildungsroman, though, is a broader story about issues such as homelessness, affordable housing, diversity and inclusiveness.

“A real downtown should have that dynamic where you’re running into different people all the time — people of different races, different cultural backgrounds and, yes, different income levels,” says Monica Gresser, principal and owner of Brazen Architecture, a commercial architecture firm located downtown. She’s hoping to kick off some conversations about those topics in a series called Brazen Conversations. Tomorrow at 7p, the firm hosts a conversation titled “Homeless for the Holidays.”

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“It’ll be a conversation about bringing attention to the homeless, about humanizing and seeing them as *people*,” says Gresser. “We often think that homeless people are just drug or gambling addicts, or mentally ill, which is certainly true in some cases, but there are other factors that make them **not so different from you and me**. Some are on the streets because they lost their homes and ran out of resources. Some are fleeing abuse, some are teens who are couch-surfing because they were kicked out of their homes for being gay or transgender.”

If you’re starting to get the feeling this might be **one big guilt-drenched lecture**, don’t. Gresser, who tapped representatives from Caridad charity and the Nevada Homeless Alliance to steer things, says it’ll be more of an open talk. “It’s definitely more of a conversation than a presentation.”

Some of the questions on her mind: Is merely feeding the homeless productive? Are job programs worthwhile? How can a housing-first program work in Las Vegas? Gresser plans to host other conversations about social issues percolating in the city as well. Why? “We just feel it’s important to give back to the community, and as an architecture firm concerned with community design, it makes sense to discuss the social issues impacting downtown.”

The “Homeless for the holidays” conversation is 7p Nov. 6 at Brazen Architecture, 1800 Industrial Road, Suite 200c.

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