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Tami Halton Pardee's vision: homes for all

By R. DANIEL FOSTER SEP 14, 2018



Tami Halton Pardee, top, hosts graduates of her Life Change Warriors at a celebration at her Venice home. (Halton Pardee + Partners)

Tami Halton Pardee is on a first-name basis with the famous who purchase her homes, as well as those who can't swing the rent on a mere room — she'll chat up “Sam at Starbucks,” or handyman Daniel, who spends nights under a lifeguard tower near her home.

The founder and CEO of Venice-based Halton Pardee + Partners — with its \$3.5-billion in sales since 2005 — is passionate about housing not just for the wealthy, but for everyone.

And she's only one standout among Los Angeles realty agents striving to fight homelessness, beyond simply opening posh mansions for charity fundraisers. They straddle two worlds as they market regal properties while helping the indigent desperate for a roof.

“There's a lot of excess,” Pardee said of Los Angeles' blistering real estate market, which parallels a crushing affordable-housing crisis. “We're all making a lot of money on real estate. We need to do more.”

For Pardee, “more” means working in the trenches. In 2017, she founded the nonprofit foundation Life Change Warriors, a six-week program that helps homeless and disadvantaged participants map out brighter, more stable futures. Forty participants have graduated from four sessions.

Pardee finances the program (\$150,000 to date), and teaches along with two life coaches. Her company also gives about 5% of net sales commissions to charities, a total of \$1.2 million so far.

“Tami's the first person I saw that went all-in, taking a portion of her commissions and giving it back,” said Gary Gold, executive vice president of Beverly Hills-based Hilton & Hyland. “Tami didn't jump on the bandwagon. She started the bandwagon.”

Known for her earthy, free-spirited style, Pardee keeps her program real by sharing her own struggles, including being molested as a child, she said. Some participants are wary at first.

“We see this affluent woman walk in who wants to help poor, pregnant girls and think: ‘Oh, great — a corny, useless class,’” said Sylvia Kang, 30, a former resident of Harvest Home, a Venice-based residential program for young homeless and pregnant women. Within the first few weekly sessions, Kang said, even stubborn participants “turned to putty” in Pardee’s hands. “They were crying.”

Clients explore troubled pasts as they identify fears, strengths and obstacles. Finally, they plot goals and the steps to reach them. Upon graduation (a celebration at Pardee’s home), the agent gives each Harvest Home participant \$2,500 toward housing. Five have earned GEDs while in the program. Nearly all of the women now have stable housing and jobs.

“No one believes in them,” said Pardee, 47, whose program also serves scores of other local charities. “They want to be seen and heard. They just want a secure job, their child to be safe and stable housing.”



Mo Diggs presents to Pardee her "life change map," a sort of guide to better living. (Halton Pardee + Partners)

Pardee said a nascent housing crisis opened her eyes nearly 20 years ago, while working as a project manager for a firm developing senior dwellings. A 2001 multiple sclerosis diagnosis further altered her career trajectory, inspiring her to “star in the life you love,” her program’s motto.

“I had no plans. I didn’t know what I wanted to do,” she said. “I realized I was just sitting on my life.”

Pardee has the most common form of MS, remitting-relapsing, which for her causes occasional blurry vision. “I’ve been very fortunate,” said the single mother of four.

In her neighborhood, tech dollars have driven up rents and home prices, amplifying the homeless and affordability crisis to a staggering degree. In L.A.

County, those living in the streets and shelters have surged 75% during the past six years, although this year has seen a small reduction, according to federal and local studies.

At another realty office, the crisis landed “literally right outside our door,” said Syd Shook of Pacific Union International in Highland Park. Earlier this year, the city removed a tent encampment from a parking lot behind the firm. Shook’s office has donated to a local homeless agency, and a voluntary program deducts \$50 from agent commissions to help fund 12 charities; all 900 of Pacific Union’s Southern California agents opt in, and many give more. “Every Realtor here cares about how to make this community livable, where everyone has a place,” he said.

Pacific Union’s Kaaren Kurtzman is another agent passionate about affordable housing. Kurtzman has been an agent for 24 years, nearly the same period she’s been on the board of PATH, an L.A.-based homeless services and housing agency with offices statewide.

Kurtzman helps raise money for PATH, which uses its annual \$62-million budget to find people permanent housing and to provide case management, healthcare and job training.

Like Pardee, Kurtzman makes no distinction between people who can afford million-dollar properties and those who struggle to pay pricey rents on studio apartments. Or live in tents.

“To me, there doesn’t seem to be any contradiction,” Kurtzman said. “I’ve always believed that we’re all responsible, that we’re all connected.”

<http://www.latimes.com/business/realestate/hot-property/la-fi-hp-pardee-affordability-crisis-20180915-story.html>