

**LOCAL NEWS**

## Riverside candlelight vigil remembers 95 homeless people who died in 2019

Eleven of them were on the county's list for housing assistance, an official said



Melody Hendrickson places a candle on the steps of the Riverside County Administration Center during a candlelight vigil in Riverside on Thursday, Dec. 19, 2019. The event honored homeless people who died in the county in the past year.

## Enterprise

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On Thursday, Dec. 19, Riverside County mourned the at least 95 homeless people who died in 2019 in the county.

“The names we read: Ramona and Raul, Robert and Ruth, they’re everyday names, the names of people we know,” Marcus Cannon, a behavioral health services administrator at Riverside University Health System, told the crowd of several dozen county employees, homeless people and family members of the homeless. “They’re 95 names of somebody’s sister or brother, likely somebody’s parent, but like all of us, they’re somebody’s child.”

Thursday’s event was Riverside County’s first such public memorial for the homeless. Saturday, Dec. 21, is [National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day](#).

As of the end of October, 72 men and 23 homeless women have died in the county, with an average age of 48 years old, according to the Riverside County Coroner’s Office. Americans, on average, live to be 78. Candles were lit for each of them and placed on the steps of the Riverside County Tavaglione annex.

According to Natalie Profant Komuro, Riverside County’s executive officer of homelessness solutions, [at least 11 of those who died were on the list to get housing](#).

“One of the things that’s tricky about this is that (the deaths) could have been weather related, but you have other underlying conditions because you have people who are chronically ill or they have addiction issues that could be a factor,” she said.

Komuro was at [Tuesday’s contentious meeting of the Riverside City Council](#). After a marathon discussion, the council voted to buy 20 shelters, add 40 beds at the homeless shelter and offer rental assistance for 40 others living on the streets. But some residents complained about the behavior of the homeless.

“That’s a fraction of the people who are experiencing homelessness in the county,” she said. The 95 names of the dead read out on Thursday night were “not

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Cannon said he knew some of the dead whose names had been read out earlier in the ceremony. One man in particular, whom he didn't know, he had met multiple times in Blythe.

"On the face of it, his problems seemed surmountable," Cannon told attendees. "But it felt like trying to untie a sticky knot, and every time he tried to pull on one end, thinking it was the right thing, another part of the knot would get tighter. He would start over and start over, trying to untangle this knot, but ultimately, he ran out of time before getting it untangled."

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## Beau Yarbrough

Beau Yarbrough wrote his first newspaper article taking on an authority figure (his middle school principal) when he was in 7th grade. He's been a professional journalist since 1992, working in Virginia, Egypt and California. In that time, he's covered community news, features, politics, local government, education, the comic book industry and more. He's covered the war in Bosnia, interviewed presidential candidates, written theatrical reviews, attended a seance, ridden in a blimp and interviewed both Batman and Wonder Woman (Adam West and Lynda Carter). He also cooks a mean pot of chili.

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