

Mayo on the Side

Mayo: Reader reaction shows big split on homeless feeding, Arnold Abbott



Arnold Abbott, the 90-year-old man who heads Love Thy Neighbor Fund, feeds homeless on Fort Lauderdale beach across from Bahia Mar, Wednesday, November 5, 2014, despite the new city of Fort Lauderdale, Florida ordinance forbidding it. Abbott was eventually cited by the Fort Lauderdale Police. (Michael Clary / Sun Sentinel)

By **Michael Mayo**, Sun Sentinel Columnist

The [ongoing battle between homeless feeding advocate Arnold Abbott, 90, and the city of Fort Lauderdale](#) has gotten worldwide attention and also has provoked strong reaction locally. Here's a sampling from my email bag that I've gotten in response to writings on the topic, including [my Sunday print column](#).

From Vicki Eckels of Fort Lauderdale:

Feeding alone does nothing to solve the core problems of homelessness. You just make it possible for the person with a drug or alcohol problem to persist in an unhealthy way of life. Like anything, when the feedings were for a few homeless people, it still wasn't a good approach but it flew under the radar. Now 100 people can gather for a meal and it's a mob scene. It's an activity that turns the public spaces that the rest of us once enjoyed into places that reek of urine and litter.

Many's the time I've told a homeless person at an intersection seeking a handout that I support the Salvation Army and to go there for help. The answer: they have too many rules. No doubt. Rules like no drinking and drugs. . .

In August of 2010, I "adopted" a 60-year-old homeless man off the streets of Fort Lauderdale. I provided him with a place to sleep, bathe, and prepare meals. I helped him get his Florida ID, Social Security documents, food stamps, veteran health care, and eventually, SS payments. I found his three daughters and helped them connect after 27 years of not seeing each other. It was a rocky, very rocky, road at times, but in September of 2013, his oldest daughter came from NJ and took him to live first with her and, ultimately, in an assisted-living facility. We remain in touch and I went to visit this past August for a huge family reunion.

Truly helping the homeless requires so much more than a meal. If someone wants help, there are organizations that address all a person's needs. If they just want a meal to keep them going for the next beer or drug fix, then good luck with that. That's their right; regulating feeding is the City's right to ensure that, as has been stated, it is carried out in an appropriate, organized, clean and healthy manner. It is a reasonable law.

From Mary Macomber:

Jack Seiler's comment that he's received a lot of input from the social services community makes me scratch my head in wonder.

I am the Chair of the South Florida Hunger Coalition, and we certainly were not consulted, although we've been at work in the community for over 12 years fighting hunger while we sadly watch it grow...

I've known Jack for years and I respect him, but he and I are 180 degrees apart on this one. I agree that he's looking an awful lot like Jim Naugle at the moment--I had expected more statesmanship from Jack...[The City Commission has] made the city of Ft. Lauderdale a laughingstock across the world and have lost us goodness knows how much good-will for our tourist business--all because they are lacking in common sense and compassion in addressing the issues of hunger and homelessness.

From Ron Book of Plantation, chair of the Miami-Dade Homeless Trust:

I do not, in any way, shape or form, support criminalizing homelessness; but I do believe...that feeding people on the streets is counterproductive and inconsistent with our efforts to get the chronic - primarily - off the streets. Fort Lauderdale's penalties deal with the feeders and not the "feedees"...Emotion has to leave the issue and we have to deal with it from a substantive perspective which also means expanding the resources in Broward County.

From Doniel Acosta of Fort Lauderdale:

If the problem with the homeless is about them urinating and defecating in public places then the solution should be for the city to provide portable toilets throughout the city where the homeless

gather. That will please many and allow Abbott to continue feeding the less fortunate. Or provide free transportation for the homeless to a designated feeding location. Seiler needs to stop criminalizing acts of kindness.

Copyright © 2014, Sun Sentinel