

Stiffing the panhandlers

Written by By Bernie Dotson
Friday, 02 December 2016 12:19



The problem of panhandling in Gallup probably isn't going to go away anytime soon. The Gallup Police Department does what it can to tackle the problem, but when you throw in intoxication and alcohol-related problems it becomes a bit much.

The best that anybody can do is treat the symptoms of panhandling and we are all thankful for what NCI offers in the form of treatment plans. Addressing the root causes of panhandling and homelessness means battling some age-old enemies: alcoholism, drug addiction, mental illness, the lack of job skills and anti-social behavior. That means fighting the battle on a variety of fronts and now simply with badges and uniforms.

The police, however, should be applauded for taking on a no-tolerance approach to illegal behavior like panhandling that hurts the quality of life particularly in downtown where tourists come to shop and take pictures. Panhandlers are a fixture downtown, trolling the sidewalks, the Downtown Walkway, hitting up people for some spare change.

The majority of Gallupians don't mind helping people who are down on their luck. But it's common knowledge that some of the money that panhandlers get goes to buy alcohol and drugs, which exacerbates the problem.

Some cities like Gallup have a tolerant attitude toward panhandling during the Christmas holidays. Gallup doesn't turn its back on people who are down and out especially during winter months and during the holiday period. The Gallup City Council has stepped in to make sure those kinds of problems are avoided.

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But we must get a firm handle on what causes conditions such as addiction and alcoholism. As the cops crack down on what causes illegal behavior on the front end, the rest of us must see what additional steps are needed on the back end.

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