

Ritter Center Calls for an End to Homelessness in Marin County *Under The Stars Sleepout asks the public to give up their bed for one night*

SAN RAFAEL– Hundreds of residents from across our communities are giving up their warm beds for one night on May 21st to participate in Ritter Center’s Under the Stars: A Sleepout to End Homelessness. Ritter Center, a nonprofit health and human services center in San Rafael, helps over 2,500 local families and individuals living in poverty or experiencing homelessness every year. The second annual sleepout brings awareness of the complex issues behind homelessness, builds compassion for people living on the streets, in their cars, or struggling to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table. The Sleepout raises \$175,000 for housing, healthcare, food, and support services that prevent and resolve homelessness.

“Choosing to sleep in an area other than your bed for one night will not remotely recreate what it is like to sleep on the streets. But it can allow for greater reflection on how and why people become homeless and the struggles they face every day and help connect the community to resolve homelessness with humanity. Who of us would want to be seen at our worst moment and have our potential defined by it?” said Mark Shotwell, Ritter Center Executive Director. “Housing is a human right. Homelessness is solvable. Everybody deserves a place to call home.”

Local companies are also using the Sleepout for employee community engagement. Ultragenyx, a Novato-based biopharmaceutical company that develops novel therapies for serious rare and ultra-rare genetic diseases, is organizing a corporate team Sleepout for its employees and their families.

“Ritter Center’s mission to ensure everyone has access to the health care and services they need connects with our organization’s values,” said Ernie Meyer, chief human resource officer and executive vice president at Ultragenyx. “Our employees are some of the most engaged, community-minded people I’ve ever worked with, and we’re proud to support the Sleepout to help Ritter Center prevent and resolve homelessness for local families.”

On the night of the Sleepout, guests will attend Ritter Center’s virtual program to hear Sandi, a Ritter Center client who lived on the streets for years, and now cooks every week from her kitchen to deliver food to those who are unhoused. Other special guests include Marin County Supervisor Damon Connolly; Marin County Supervisor Katie Rice; City of San Rafael Kate Colin; City of San Rafael Councilmember Eli Hill; Director of Marin County Health and Human Services Benita McLarin; Summer Cassel, District Representative for Senator Mike McGuire; and featured guest, Sam Tsemberis, PhD, who founded Pathways to Housing and developed the Housing First program.

The event will also feature a fundraising awards ceremony, meditative sound bath yoga, and a children’s book reading. The community is invited to sign up online to be a part of the Sleepout. Paid participants get a free 2022 Under the Stars T-shirt. All participants and donors will receive a virtual goody bag with discounts and treats from local businesses. A

silent auction will open a week before the event and close at midnight during the Sleepout. There is a \$25 fee for participants ages 6 and older. Children 5 and under are free.

Major sponsors include: Marin Homeless Aid, Mechanics Bank, Heritage Bank of Commerce, Bank of Marin, Nugget Markets, *Marin Living Magazine*, Wipfli, Cavallo Point, First Federal Savings and Loan, Marin Sanitary Service, Pasha Group, Jessica Hansen Consulting, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *SF Gate*, Good Earth Natural Foods, Montecito Plaza, MCC Building Maintenance, Unicorn Group, Marin Association of REALTORS®, Spirit Airlines, and many others.

See a full list of sponsors and learn more and register for the Sleepout at Sleepout.Rittercenter.org.

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Ritter Center

Ritter Center's mission is to prevent and resolve homelessness and improve the health, dignity and well-being of people living in poverty in Marin County by providing high-quality, culturally sensitive, easily accessible medical care and social services. People in need can visit Ritter Center and receive high-quality medical and behavioral health care regardless of their ability to pay. Its highly trained team combines national clinical best practices with a whole-person care approach to solving each person's health, food, and housing needs. With over 40 years of experience, Ritter Center has built industry-leading knowledge and collaborative partnerships with County agencies, health partners, and like-minded organizations to help people overcome barriers to aid and create complete support solutions that sustainably improve people's lives.