



gothamist t-shirts at tiny factory



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## The LAist Interview: Tom Bagamane



During the insanity holiday season, it's important that we remember to step outside of our own realm and think of others. Yes, it's cliché, but, yes, it's true. This week LAist talks to Tom Bagamane of [The Giving Spirit](#), an Angeleno who's dedicated his work and efforts to improving the lives of others in our own Tale of Two Cities.

### **1. Age and Occupation:**

44, Exec VP, American Health Sciences  
Chairman & Founder, The Giving Spirit

### **2. What inspired you to establish The Giving Spirit?**

Homelessness in LA is at epidemic numbers because of the size of our population, the allure of our weather and some significant holes in our health and social services system. Simply put: we have so much; they have so little. It was easy to be inspired to act.

**3. Is there anything new that you've learned from your constituency or that surprised you after working with the homeless population?**

The profile of LA's homeless is misrepresented. There are many more families, children and women living among the 234,000 homeless in LA than people realize. Many of the parents have lost their jobs and just want to be back to work as soon as possible.

**4. What does the charity do after each December's distribution?**

For starters, we never stop fundraising—it's a year round function for all of our Board Members. We also evaluate the feedback we receive from clients to determine whether we provided them with the right supplies, the right amount of supplies and to see if we can give them more next time.

**5. Is it hard to fundraise in Los Angeles?**

No. Not if you are sincerely passionate about a very relevant issue. Granted there are a lot of people with equally compelling causes, so it can be a bit competitive. However, there is a lot of disposable income here in LA and lot of very caring people, despite LA's self-absorbed image.

**6. How do you obtain most of your volunteers?**

Word of mouth—this is our 6th year, so we are getting some “old faithfuls” that bring more people with them. As word of us grows, we attract more and more new faces. Our Website, [www.thegivingspirit.org](http://www.thegivingspirit.org), is also huge.

**7. How long have you lived in Los Angeles, and which neighborhood do you live in?**

Brentwood—eight years.

**8. Where are you from?**

Arlington, VA/DC

**9. What's your preferred mode of transportation?a.**

As an East Coast transplant I love to walk, but I did get hit by a car recently...and I was in the crosswalk.

**10. How often do you ride the MTA subway or light rail?**

Never, unfortunately. I miss the DC Metro system—that's about all I miss about DC—except my Mum, Dad and my friends.

**11. What's your favorite movie(s) or TV show(s) that are based in LA?**

*Sunset Boulevard, LA Confidential, LA Story, Collateral, "Dragnet," "Joey"*

**12. Best LA-themed book(s)?**

*LA Confidential, Raymond Chandler's mystery novels*

**13. Share your best celebrity sighting experience.**

My first weekend in Brentwood I saw Jennifer Aniston jogging with her trainer in front of my place—beautiful. Others include Spielberg calmly stuck behind me in traffic—James Woods swearing he knew me at a cocktail party.

**14. In your opinion, what's the best alternate route to the 405?**

Living in San Diego. The 405 is like the plague...you can run but sure as hell can't hide from it.

**15. What's the best place to walk in LA?**

Montana Ave from 15th to 6th/San Vicente from Bundy to Wilshire. Just got to be careful. Like I said, I was hit by a car in May in my neighborhood. I'm still recovering—idiot drivers haunt this town.

**16. It's 9:30 PM on Thursday. Where are you coming from and where are you going?**

Heading back from the gym, stopping at Bandera for a peek and one drink before heading home.

**17. If you could live in LA during any era, when would it be?**

The 60's during the height of the Beach Boys and Beatles and a time when you found cheap, large pieces of real estate to be gobbled up.

**18. What is the "center" of LA to you?**

The Westside: west of the 405, north of Washington Blvd., South of Sunset. Is that too large a center?

**19. If you were forced to live in a neighboring county, which would you choose? Ventura County is a wussy answer.**

I guess Orange, but only if I could live in a really cool house at the beach.

**20. If you could live in any neighborhood or specific house in LA, where/which would it be?**

Santa Monica—north of Wilshire, west of Bundy, south of Sunset.

**21. Los Angeles is often stereotyped as a hard place to find personal connections and make friends. Do you agree with that assessment? Do you find it challenging to make new friends here?**

Friends? Heck no. I have been very blessed with amazing friendships here. No regrets. Now, dating...that's a different story. Some great stories out there—some not so together folks posing as sane, often a roll of the dice—makes the chase very interesting.

**22. What is the city's greatest secret?**

That there are many real, good, caring people in this town. You gotta want to find 'em, though. Precious stones are always the hardest to find.

**23. Drinking, driving. They mix poorly, and yet they're inexorably linked. How do you handle this conflict?**

Cabs, DD's, walking to my watering holes, and the fear of possibly throwing away everything I've worked hard for.

**24. Describe your best LA dining experience.**

Dinner at Vincenti in Brenty—Mo Murphy is the consummate hostess/owner in the city, and a great person to have a drink with.

**25. What do you have to say to East Coast supremacists?**

Being an East Coaster myself I'd say "Get over yourself and thank these nice folks for allowing you into the best city in the Union; in spite of all your uptight sh\_\_t..."

**26. Do you find the threat of earthquakes preferable to the threat of hurricanes and long winters?**

Preferable? Hmmm—a random bullet or constant slingshot pellets? I'll take the random bullet and pray that I am wearing my armor that day.

**27. Where do you want to be when the Big One hits?**

At the ocean, at sunset, on an empty beach with my girl, a great bottle of Cabernet with the Beach Boys singing "Good Vibrations" on the CD player. These are all reasons that called me here when I was a wee lad in Virginia, they're also reasons that would make it all worthwhile when "It" hits.