

SALEM PEOPLE AND PLACES

Hood House aims to be a "welcome home" for low-income, elderly women

The boarding house can fit five women and the owners, Russ and Delana Beaton, are looking at applicants referred through ARCHES. So far, the couple has faced an unanticipated obstacle.

By Saphara Harrell - Salem Reporter August 30, 2019 at 9:18am





Russ and Delana Beaton stand outside Hood House, a new boarding home for low-income, elderly women. (Troy Brynelson/Salem Reporter)

When Russ and Delana Beaton decided to take money out of their retirement savings to buy a five-bedroom house, they did it with one goal in mind.

They wanted to create a boarding house for elderly women that had been priced out of the rental market.

After retiring as a counselor from Salem Keizer Public Schools, Delana started volunteering with warming and cooling shelters.

“And I keep meeting these women,” she said. “They’re just heartbreaking for me.”

Delana said they were women who had lived in a family home and when their husbands died, they couldn’t hang onto the big house. After moving into apartments, they were priced out.

“It finally gets to the point where this population can’t pay the increase,” she said.

Delana said she kept meeting women who were living in their cars.

“Then they show up at ARCHES. They walk in and they don’t look like the other homeless. They’re alone and they just have this terrified deer in the headlights look,” she said.

The couple has been working with The ARCHES Project for referrals and held an open house a month ago to show community members around the newly renovated space.

Jimmy Jones, executive director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency, which oversees ARCHES, said the program has assessed more than 6,000 homeless individuals in Marion and Polk Counties since October 2016.

Those assessments give the organization data to cull from to determine who’s a good fit for different types of housing, and last week the program started referring women to the new property.

For Hood House, Jones is looking for women whose needs are low and can thrive in a group setting.

Jones said the women ARCHES is referring will most likely qualify for rental assistance. The program has an elderly rental assistance account that helps pay rent for those over the age of 58 for a few months.

Most of the women will likely be on social security, Jones said, adding that the monthly government checks aren’t enough to exit homelessness.

In Salem, a deposit runs around \$1,000, but Jones said it’s not uncommon for ARCHES to spend \$2,000 to \$3,000 to

get someone rehoused.

Jones estimated there are 30 to 40 homeless individuals that could benefit from a Hood House-type setup.

“If civically-minded individuals would copy this model and purchase these kinds of homes where we could have a group home environment, we could really make a big impact on a lot of the newly homeless population,” he said.

But there’s been an unanticipated snag. So far, most of the women the Beatons have interviewed to live in the house are physically incapable of climbing the stairs in the two-story home.

Delana said some of the women have walkers, making the eight stairs from the sidewalk and the 15 stairs to the second floor an impediment.

“And there’s just no way they can do that,” she said.

To combat this, Delana said they’ve extended the eligibility age from 55 down to 50 in hopes that the younger cohort will be more mobile.

“I was obviously optimistic, I thought that would take about a week,” Delana said of finding occupants.

Delana said the housing isn’t meant to be transitional.

“It’s designed to be ‘welcome home,’ she said.

Delana said rent is based on what the couple needs to maintain the \$267,500 house. Prices range from \$400 to \$450 per room based on square footage.

The couple is estimating one-fifth of the utility bill will cost \$120 per month.

“Ideally, they wouldn’t be paying more than 30% of that (income), but realistically they’re not going to be able to get under what we’re offering,” she said.

Russ said it’s not a charity. He took money out of his retirement account – which invests those dollars in Wall Street – to buy the house and fix it up.

“Somebody said, isn’t it wonderful what you people have done?” he said. “No. I am an economist. I want the main story to be people like me, we have a little nest egg, but Wall Street is not my favorite place. I basically pulled a bunch of money from New York and put it in this house.”

Delana said some of her friends have said they’re going to watch the project unfold and might do something similar if it’s successful.

There are also those who question her decision to take money out of retirement savings.

“I just smile, I don’t answer much to that,” she said. “I still don’t think it’s crazy I just think it needs time.”

Have a tip? Contact reporter Saphara Harrell at 503-549-6250 or saphara@salemreporter.com.



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