

OPINION

GUEST OPINION

A bustling oasis serves the homeless in Texas

By Andrea Jansen

I was returning to Jackson County in my motorhome after spending time in New Jersey before my mother passed away. Summertime was approaching so I knew competing with snowbirds for affordable RV parking would be impossible.

In today's climate of Recreational Vehicle and Tiny Home Madness magazines, privately-owned RV parks now restrict older models, and my 1992 full-time residence is barred from lengthy occupancy. For thousands of miles I parked in campgrounds, parking lots and rest areas, always on the lookout for a decent-looking RV park where I could afford to live.

What I found was Community First Village, a development created for the chronically homeless in east Austin, Texas. Over 200 tiny homes, camp-style tents and refurbished RVs populate 25-plus acres of land donated by a private benefactress. I became a Workamper: volunteering a number of hours per week (as an

artist) in exchange for an RV pad and utilities. One month turned into nine, during which time I not only transformed second-hand pieces into attractive furnishings for the homes; but came to better understand the people behind the stigma.

Community First has been growing for approximately three years. An adjacent parcel of land is currently under development. The village receives outstanding support throughout Austin, and those interested in applying the model to their own communities can learn first-hand. Like most people, I was dumbfounded. The community garden supplies produce each Saturday, and the small but well-stocked grocery contains a venue for resident artist's crafts. Facilities include a health clinic, art studio, blacksmith, library, hair salon, dog park, maintenance shop and quiet areas for reflection.

Social workers and counselors are on call, and dentists, attorneys and even a veterinarian volunteer their services. A continuing education

program has recently been implemented and the local bus line has a stop on the property. It's common to see camera crews taping everyday life.

Residents pay a nominal monthly amount based on the home style selected. The homeless are not necessarily destitute. Many have outside jobs, receive government assistance or are supported by Good Samaritans.

"You can take a person off the street, but it's hard to take the street out of a person."

Depositing a chronically homeless person into a permanent structure and abandoning them to navigate through society alone again is not only frightening, it's cruel. Illnesses, addictions and psychological issues cannot be fixed with four walls and a roof.

Even with the support available some people cannot adjust, and choose to return to the streets. It was heartbreaking to witness some of the kindest people climb out of despair, just to be knocked off the ladder by a single setback. The success stories overwhelmingly

outweigh the failures, but it's those few who fall through the cracks who need our help the most.

Helping residents transition into self-sufficient, confident individuals capable of re-entering society are Missionals, who commit to living among the community for at least one year. They provide support, advice and, for some, spiritual guidance while working around the village. The success of the program lies not with its amenities so much as the moral support the village provides and acceptance from the community at large.

Corporate executives wield hammers, shovels and rakes, while students and civic clubs help with the grounds. Starbucks donates snacks and a butcher provides individual cuts of meat to the Saturday market.

Local neighborhoods, organizations and church groups organize community meals served on-site, where not only food but camaraderie is shared at the room-sized picnic tables. The general public attends free outdoor

movie nights in the amphitheater, all sponsored by a local theater. Snacks are sold, artists demonstrate their crafts and people are encouraged to tour the grounds to see what is not-so-scary in their back yards.

If ever I felt short-changed by life's fortunes, all I needed was to look around at my neighbors, challenging the most daunting obstacles day after day, smiling. It's hard to do that in a vacuum, but their chances of success are greatly increased through the comprehensive support of the community from inside and out.

Medford is fortunate to have Hope Village, and most people are rooting for its success. It would be nice to create a larger model outside of town not for 15 but 150. They did it in Texas; we can do it in Oregon. There are generous individuals willing to pick up a tab if they feel they're supporting a winning venture, and Hope Village is certainly heading in the right direction.

Andrea Jansen lives in Eagle Point.

GUEST OPINION

District taking steps to address behaviors

By Jeff Kinsella

At the Medford School

understand the needs of my students and how to imple-



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in the crossfire of a liberal-conservative battle royal over a Trump-nominated Supreme Court justice. Vote yes, and their liberal base will be apoplectic; vote no, and their pro-Trump constituents