

NEWS

City cuts ribbon for transitional house Volunteers renovate property, house

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City officials and volunteers on March 23 cut the ceremonial ribbon to mark the opening of Elk Grove's first transitional home.

The home known as Grace House is located at 9112 Jonell Court in Old Town. Grace House will provide a temporary place for five homeless people to stay while they get on their feet and work on finding permanent housing. The residents can stay for up to six months at the house.

Phil Machek, who attends Sun Grove Church in Laguna, said going from the streets to permanent housing could be a difficult adjustment.

He equated that to driving fast enough to merge into traffic on the freeway.

"If you're starting at zero when you try to pull into traffic, the cars are going too fast," Machek said. "But if you're already going 45-50 miles per hour, it's not that much more to get to 60-65."

He added, "A lot of these people have been out of the mainstream for so long that they're beaten down, they don't know what it takes, they're discouraged, or they have substance abuse issues. By getting stabilized here, it kicks them up 10-15 miles per hour, so that merge is not such a dramatic change."

City officials spent \$240,000 to purchase and renovate the 2,200 square-foot, five-bedroom, three-bathroom home last year. They used an expected windfall of Community Development Block Grant funding after some projects were canceled or finished under-budget.

Volunteers from local service clubs, the informal Homeless Solutions Committee, and People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) then spent many hours rehabilitating the house and the property. They cleaned gutters, worked on landscaping, and painted over what had been a teal blue exterior with a more neutral color.

The interior has hardwood floors instead of multi-colored carpeting. Volunteers also replaced a dilapidated fence while a contractor handled technical aspects that included installing a needed heating and cooling system, and fixing the roof.

"It was extremely rundown. The physical appearance was very rundown," said Machek, who is also a member of the committee and PATH.

Elk Grove Mayor Gary Davis noted the unique collaboration between the nonprofit organizations, the local business community that provided appliances and furniture at reduced costs, multiple local service clubs that volunteered hours, and the city that purchased the property.

"It's the best kind of partnership. It's sort of like innovative common sense," he said. "It's innovative because it's not often that you get that kind of collaboration, but it's common sense because shouldn't we do that for more projects?"

City Housing Program Manager Sarah Bontrager joined Davis and members of the committee, PATH, and Sacramento Self-Help Housing that will manage the house in cutting the ribbon.



Photos by Steve Crowley - Elk Grove Mayor Gary Davis and volunteers cut the ribbon at Grace House, Elk Grove's first transitional house for homeless.

"A lot of you have put a lot of sweat equity into this house, and I'm so excited to stand here to celebrate this grand opening," Davis said.

John Foley of Sacramento Self-Help Housing said that type of partnership is rare but that he felt it could work because of the collaborative effort of many different people.

"Everyone thought Elk Grove would be a middle class community with people who wouldn't have social issues, and it would be a beautiful place to live," he said. "It is a beautiful place to live, but there are social issues and there is poverty here in Elk Grove."

Foley said being able to house people for weeks or months while they look for better employment or get disability benefits if they are disabled and help people get to where they can have their own home again is important to the organization.

Bontrager said recently that she expected the city to turn over the property to Sacramento Self-Help Housing by the first week in April.

Foley said he knows of three people in other types of housing and possibly a fourth person who could be ideal candidates to live in the house.

The cost to fund Sacramento Self-Help Housing and pay regular bills was estimated to be about \$30,000 a year. Impact Community Church will pick up the tab for the first year.

"It's an honor to represent the generous people of our church and of the faith community to be able to partner in this way because that's what our church is all about," Barry Smith, the church's senior pastor, said before saying a prayer of blessing for the house and cutting the ribbon.

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