

HOME SWEET HOME 4 VETS

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by Carol Bower Foote

A safe, dry roof over our heads. A room of our own. A clean place to prepare meals or take a shower. A community to be part of. For any of us, this is a blessing. For a low income veteran, this can be the key to a fresh start.



American Legion Post 178 of Rio Vista has seen this need and an opportunity to serve those who have served us. Ted Yarnes, chairman of the 178 Housing Project for Vets, provided some history for the efforts now underway. Four years ago, the Post began a golf tournament to raise funds to provide permanent housing for veterans in Rio Vista. While successful, the funds raised at these events fell short of what was required to get started. Seeing the need for a partner, the Post began a conversation with Community Action North Bay (CAN-B) based on that group's experience with housing homeless veterans.

At the March 12 RioVision General Meeting, Ruth Metz, Executive Director of Community Action North Bay (<http://canbinc.org/directors-message/>) explained her organization's relationship with the Veterans Administration and the County over the past 8 years in providing temporary transitional housing for a small number of veterans with limited means. CAN-B owns temporary housing for about 20 vets in Dixon and Fairfield, and partners with the VA to operate it. With a 95% success rate, CAN-B has helped vets connect with services and the community, and gain a source of income. 132 veterans have been placed into permanent housing. Now, partnering with Habitat for Humanity, CAN-B is having a permanent home for vets built in Dixon. Post 178 is looking to this project as a model for the one in Rio Vista.



Habitat for Humanity of Solano/NAPA County (<http://solanonapahabitat.org/>) had been looking for a project to assist veterans. They had witnessed how repairing a home for a veteran to increase its value enough to qualify for a reverse mortgage gave him a fresh start. Gerry Raycraft, President of Solano Napa Habitat, explained that Habitat is allowed to partner with a non-profit to build a rental property for veterans. Working with CAN-B, the Dixon project will provide a 6 bedroom, 3 bath home for permanent rental housing for vets. Each veteran will have his/her own room and share bath, kitchen, and living facilities. Home Depot Foundation, who is donating lumber and building pre-fab walls, has also provided tools, cash, and volunteers to past Habitat projects. There is an opportunity for the Rio Vista project to get similar assistance in April 2019.



With both temporary and permanent housing, donations and grants help to fund supplemental food, utilities, transportation to appointments, clinic support, and case management. The goal is to settle unsheltered veterans in a home and build up their lives and connections from there. These vets have accountability for paying their rent and maintaining the property inside and out. VA referrals are carefully and heavily screened for stability before being placed in a neighborhood.

Gerry went on to explain how Habitat and CAN-B are looking to partner with American Legion Post 178 to build a similar home on county property near the Veterans Memorial Building in Rio Vista to permanently house 6-8 veterans. The goal is to leverage the architect's plans for Dixon for the Rio Vista home. If all goes well, concrete for the foundation could be poured as early as Spring 2019. Community engagement will be important to the success of this project so stay tuned for updates on how we can participate in creating "home sweet home" for those who have served.