

## **A summary of what Albany has done in serving homeless persons.**

My goal is to get a roof over a person's head instead of enabling he/she to stay homeless. This reference is what our Albany community has done to serve the homeless and how we worked together to support this goal.

### **Starting off with Camp Boondoggle (The north end of Simpson Park):**

I was raised in Albany in the late 60's and 70's and my father owned a service station, located at Pacific Boulevard and Madison Street, which was close to the main Union Pacific Railroad line. There were homeless individuals in Albany during that time, yet Albany's population was just around 10,000 residents. The homeless then were not visible in the community and they kept to themselves. Sadly, they were referred to as hobos or winos. Many were drifters that were passing through Albany via the railroad. They would work a day or two as a handyman to make a few dollars for food and necessities. There was a camp along the tracks and it was referred to as the hobo camp. Also, on the north end of Simpson Park there was a larger camp. I remember seeing people come off of the railroad or walk along the highway into my father's service station asking for directions to the camp. You never saw anyone panhandling back then or in any other community. The homeless didn't beg for money or food but were very grateful when someone would lend a helpful hand. I do remember the drifters offering to help clean around my father's service station. My father frequently would hire a new employee, who would walk up and down Pacific Boulevard to every business seeking employment.

Homelessness has always been a situation for people throughout the nation. The population in Oregon has grown significantly and the same as the ratio of homelessness, which today makes this way of living more visible. There are many more reasons and situations the homeless today face than decades ago. But most are similar; family issues, mental health problems, alcoholism, criminal activity, etc. What we see today is more mental health issues and abuse from drugs and alcohol, which eventually can lead someone into homelessness. I have come across some homeless who choose this lifestyle and they believe it is their right to make that choice.

In the later 90's, the Simpson family donated 160 acres for a conservation easement park to the City of Albany. This land housed the old "hobo" homeless camp I referred to above, which was on the north end of the property and north of the two lakes, off of the Willamette River. Today this land is known as Simpson Park and it lies in the city limits of Millersburg, but is the City of Albany's jurisdiction.

This homeless camp was called by its residents-Camp Boondoggle. This camp had decades of discarded trash thrown along Burkhart Creek, which is close to the Willamette River. There were dozens of current and past camps in this area. The homeless constructed hooches (a shack) that consisted of living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms. The camps had generators, welders, appliances, batteries and whatever it took to make this camp habitable for the

campers to survive. Sadly, all the lumber and every piece of equipment was stolen from the surrounding neighborhoods and commercial areas.

This is what prompted the process in the need to address the crime in this surrounding area, as the residents in the neighborhood had complained for years about the crime. In the late spring of 2006, the neighbors brought their complaints forward to the City Council, as they had enough. The commercial areas also dealt with a high volume of theft. Also, this camp experienced a homicide that year, and as of today has not been solved, and greatly added to the need for the City to address this illegal camp.

When the City receives criminal complaints, the police department identifies the problem and seeks a solution. Considerable thought was given and a solution was to shut down Camp Boondoggle. Also, in order for the City to stay in compliance with the donation of the conservation easement for Simpson Park, a camp with human waste and enormous amount of trash was more than enough reason to shut down this forty-year-old camp.

Who were the campers at this time in Camp Boondoggle? Terry and Daniel had lived there for fifteen years and this was their lifestyle and place to call home. They had set up their own personal rules for the camp, which one was to not allow drugs. So the homeless who were not allowed in the camp due to substance abuse, ended up setting up their tents outside of Camp Boondoggle's boundaries and along our riverfront and natural areas. The homeless population problem and issues grew over the years. The reason the Boondoggle campers didn't stay at our local Helping Hands Homeless Shelter, where they could get a roof over their head and three meals a day, was because the shelter at that time was not enforcing the eviction of guests who were under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This provided an excuse for other homeless to live in tents along our public areas. (*Helping Hands operating guidelines will be addressed below*).

In May, 2006- the police department notified the Camp Boondoggle residents about the need to vacate their camp and as expected that was not well received. Over a course of time, the campers were not willing to leave the camp, so the City Council gave the go-ahead to allow a 30 day notice before eviction. I was a City Councilor at the time and the campers came to a City Council meeting hoping we would not evict them. Not all of the campers came to the meeting, but those who came touched my heart. I thought they seemed very capable to be employed but could use some help in finding a job and housing. The City Council made the decision to proceed with the eviction, as we still had an obligation to protect the park's environment, as public lands are not for people to use as their private, permanent residence.

I remember not sleeping that night after the council decision, worrying about where these campers would go. So I decided to go out to the camp to see for myself. One of our police captains, Ben, who was assisting the campers took me. This was a mile walk from the parking lot of Simpson Park, which today is the Talking Water Garden's parking lot. I met the campers and saw their camps and the construction they made in order to live in what they referred to as

a hooch. When I went home I was still convinced they were employable and could find housing. So that following Sunday, I decided to post a note on each camp with an offer that I would give whoever wanted a job a ride in to town to seek employment. I remember my husband at that time knew he better go out to the camp with me that day or I was going by myself. We both hiked out to the camp that afternoon and posted notices at each camp (24 campers at the time) to be at the parking lot the following morning for a ride into town and I would help them find a job, so they could qualify for housing.

The next morning I was met by six campers. I only had room in my car for five and one person (Mike) rode his bicycle and followed us in to town. I first took them to FISH, on Hill Street, to get free clean clothes. Then we went to Helping Hands Shelter so the campers could shower to be prepared for seeking employment.

Our first stop was some retail businesses and I introduced them to the managers that I knew. They were given applications and seeing the excitement on the campers' faces in having a job application was very encouraging. I remember Deidra mentioning that whenever they would ask a business if they were hiring, they would be rejected for an application. I understood that reason, as the clothing odor of the campers was not pleasant. After the first retail business, I noticed that same odor and it was Tommy's jacket, so I had him remove it at the next business. The campers were used to the outdoors and staying in their same clothes over a length of time, so they did not realize the odors that were absorbed in their clothes.

Toward the end of the day, I took the campers to the employment office to update their resumes and to gather more information for seeking employment. One camper wanted to stay in my car while the others went inside, as she was getting a headache. The other campers told me about her situation, as she was entering withdrawals from alcohol. This was a new environment for me to experience and very educational, yet it was comforting to see how each camper looked out for one another.

After we finished the day, Mike asked if we could stop off at an agency to get some propane vouchers. What I learned from these campers that day, it is a full-time job just to maintain their homeless lifestyle and in order to survive they know of every avenue to get social services and assistance. They have a different location every day to pick up something for their survival, which is a hindrance for them to focus on finding a job.

I took them the next day to find employment and this process took a few weeks. By then, I had 12-14 campers accepting my help to find a job. As I was able to convince some employers to employ them, my next step was to find housing, which was even more challenging. But in order for some to be employed they needed a post office box number, their ID and a cell phone for a potential employer to call them. I then asked my fellow City Councilors to allocate \$1000 to assist these campers with basic needs such as an address and phone number, along with a down payment for rent. This money came from an old HUD affordable housing fund and greatly helped in getting the campers into housing. I believed it was the least we could do as a City in

order to assist with relocation efforts. I was the City's representative to the board of directors for Albany Partnership for Housing and Community Development and we became the agency for the campers to contact to seek assistance with the funds from the City.

One day as I was headed to the camp to pick up the campers, a sheriff's deputy was searching a camper and while he saw the other campers there, he checked their identification. He had no choice, but to arrest five campers that had warrants for nonpayment of their parole and probation costs, which is a contempt of court. When a homeless person is under parole and probation they incur a monthly fee, yet if they have no income to pay the fee, then a contempt of court is added to their record. When the deputy said he had to take them to jail, I told the campers I will come down to see what it will take to get you out.

A camper, Vicki, told me Mike was hiding in his tent, as he knew there was a warrant for his arrest. Mike was fearful and did not want to go to jail again. He had been in prison before for burglaries and was fearful to go back.

I needed to go get Mike to turn himself in to the jail. So Daniel, who was a former camper (mentioned above) showed me how to go in between the railroad cars to reach the camp, instead of taking the one mile trail. He and I climbed over the railroad cars hitches, which is not an easy task, and he helped me find Mike. Mike was still in his tent hiding and it took a while to convince him to trust me and to turn himself in at the jail. I told him in order to get into housing he needed to work through his hurdles or he would never reach the goal of getting his own housing. Eventually, Mike came out of the tent and let me drive him to the jail.

While at the jail waiting to see when they were going to release the campers, I remember a lieutenant looking at me and saying "I can't believe what you are doing, but I will release all of them". Daniel and I were so pleased and the campers were astonished at not having to stay in jail. I was able to take them back to Camp Boondoggle and from this situation had built trust between me and the campers.

Daniel was living in a transitional house at the time (Mike and Ruby's) and some campers were able to move there the next day. Then I found a landlord who trusted me and rented to four of the campers. These four campers now had jobs and a place to live. Over a course of a few months, I found the rest of the camper's jobs and housing. The other campers at Boondoggle who did not ask for my help left the Albany area.

(As I started writing this during the winter of 2016, Michael passed away on Dec. 30, 2016. He and his wife Ruby case managed many of the Camp Boondoggle residents and many more homeless over the following years. Michael and Ruby were angels to open up their home to truly be of service to the homeless.)

Also, the cleanup of Boondoggle was an expensive process due to manpower and dumpster fees. There were over a 1000 bicycle parts along the creek bank, and ten large dumpsters of garbage were hauled out. As of today, the environment still has not fully recovered.

What I learned through the Camp Boondoggle experience was in order to maintain a lifestyle of being homeless, it is very difficult for someone to focus on seeking a job, and let alone find housing.

While our goal was for every person to have a roof over their head, we had to plan for what Albany needed to do in order to reach that goal.

Camp Boondoggle started this process by addressing the needs of reducing homelessness. In November 2006, the City initiated the first summit meeting to address the issues surrounding homelessness. This was a well-attended summit with social service agencies and homeless advocates. The summit identified the needs and current major gaps in the community. All social service agencies collaborated to find solutions to the challenges of a homeless person. This launched the networking of all agencies and many constructive outcomes have risen since then. One was the formation of a board to address homelessness issues with local agencies called HEART-Homeless Enrichment and Rehabilitation Team. This board meets monthly and is still strong in addressing new issues surrounding homelessness.

### **Albany's Homeless Housing Plan:**

At this time a nationwide effort was taking place to end homelessness. As the issue was rising, Governor Ted Kulongoski at that time challenged cities to end homelessness. Funding was provided to counties to establish a 10-year plan to end homelessness. A committee was formed for Linn and Benton Counties, along with the agencies that attended our homeless summit. I co-chaired Linn County's plan. Our committee agreed to not label our plan 'to end homelessness', since someone could be in housing today and not the next day, as homelessness would never go away. Linn County's plan was labeled A 10 Year Homeless Housing Plan. JoAnn was the staff member who led this plan. JoAnn today is very involved with homeless issues.

This plan had committee members who basically wanted to enable a homeless person to stay homeless while most members wanted a goal of having a roof over every person's head. The members knew that enabling a person to stay homeless was not a solution to their housing problem. This plan was the foundation of how to get a person in to housing.

What the plan identified was the overall existing services, the needs and what gaps there were in order to get a homeless person into housing. Homeless persons all have different life situations as to why they end up homeless. Some people are not employable and might have mental and disability issues, as well as financial hardships and personal behavior/challenges. This provided a base to the homeless plan.

This Homeless Housing Plan was a great tool in bringing all social service agencies together to collaborate their services and most of all to make sure limited services were not overlapping from agency to agency. This was a good first step, as we had agencies competing against each

other in providing services. This plan helped in the subsequent years, as I was approached many times then as Mayor from someone wanting to start up a new non-profit, and I was able to have them partner with existing non-profits or fill a gap in services.

Many people do not realize that every non-profit has administrative costs associated with its operation. When donations are sought to support a non-profit, it takes away funds from actual assistance to a homeless person who needs housing and services. This plan enabled our agencies to work together and strive to reach out to as many homeless as possible with the limited resources at hand.

During this time of establishing the Ten-Year Plan, a local non-profit Love Inc. was created to be the networking and clearing house to meet the homeless needs in the community. In 2008, the City of Albany supported the start-up costs for Love Inc. in order to have this network with supportive services. Love Inc. expanded to a larger location in 2017, and now serves more senior needs.

One of the most effective steps in serving the homeless was for agencies to seek Social Security benefits for individuals with mental and physical disabilities, that were unable to be employed. Once someone had an income from Social Security, he or she was able to qualify for housing or a HUD housing voucher.

#### **Case management through housing programs:**

The one major need identified in the Homeless Housing Plan was the big gap for individual case management services referred to as supportive services. The case management concept is for a social service agency to individually work with a person to identify what factors forced them into homelessness and the steps to move them in to housing and/or self-sufficiency. This could result in money management classes, behavior management, good housekeeping skills, work ethics, furthering an education, etc. As of today, supportive services is still a strong component and will be an on-going need.

During the Great Recession In 2009, the federal government started a stimulus program to deal with the many foreclosed homes nationwide. One piece of this stimulus program was to allocate funds to local government agencies to purchase a foreclosed home, renovate to standard housing and sell to non-profits for one dollar per home, subject to providing supportive services for the life of the property.

Since 1998, I have been on the board of directors for Albany Partnership for Housing and Community Development (APHCD). APHCD is the only non-profit housing provider serving families and seniors living in 136 low income rental units in Albany. As stated above, APHCD is in partnership with the City, and I am the appointed representative to the organization. After Camp Boondoggle and seeing the need for case management/supportive services, I drafted a plan called Life Skills Housing for establishing supportive services for APHCD's residents. The challenging piece to implementing this plan was the cost to purchase a property and pass on to

a tenant affordable rent, yet it was cost prohibitive to support the staff in providing the services for Life Skills Housing.

When I heard about the federal stimulus funds for supportive services, we immediately contacted the Community Services Consortium, who were the recipient of the funds to seek a foreclosed property. APHCD was able to acquire a duplex and house fully renovated for one dollar each. This enabled us to launch our Life Skills Housing Plan. The house is for persons with disabilities, and the duplex is for families. The requirement is they must accept and follow case management/supportive services.

A recent success story from one of the former families, is a single mother with four children who followed her supportive services plan very well. The mother eventually got a living-wage job and moved toward self-sufficiency. One of her sons had personal issues and eventually a criminal record, yet he was very young. He now has his grades up and is doing well and attendance in school has improved. His mother eventually moved out and bought her own home. This is a benefit of supportive services, yet there still is a high demand for more services in the city.

Another success story is a unit that is managed by Linn County Mental Health (LCMH). APHCD provides the oversight and property management along with LCMH's daily management for three tenants. These tenants were previously homeless and by providing a stable environment for managing their mental health needs, the tenants are able to enjoy a stable lifestyle, and some residents have moved toward living on their own. There is a strong need in our community for more housing with this model.

Most of Albany Partnership for Housing's units receive a low income tax credit and the tax credits need to be passed on to tenants for a rent reduction. In 2016, I initiated a plan and gained APHCD's board approval to apply our tax credit toward four to seven apartments- rent free- to serve the homeless, in order to get them in to housing. This program is called Step-Forward Housing and is a partnership with several government agencies and non-profits to provide case management to the tenants. The agencies are on a team to review each tenant's housing needs and what services are needed to move that person toward being self-sufficient. This program has been a valuable service in providing housing for the homeless, but still there is more demand in our community.

Linn Benton Housing Authority in Albany manages all HUD rental housing vouchers and also provides low-income housing for seniors. There has always been a lack of housing vouchers and most often when more vouchers are released they are not at a high enough level to afford market-rate rents. The parameters set with HUD housing vouchers needs to have flexibility in order to be utilized for a region's rise in market rents.

In 2015, Innovative Housing built Woodwind Apartments on Salem Avenue, providing low-income work force housing of 54 units.

**For someone to ask what is the City of Albany doing to help the homeless or provide low income housing, the above programs show how much is being done in our community. (More on housing below.)**

**Persons with Mental Health Needs:**

Persons needing mental health services is at a higher demand today than in the past but programs are better managed today. After Camp Boondoggle, for a few years there were many persons with mental health disabilities that made finding housing for them a challenge. Linn County Mental Health strengthened its programs to individually help each person with their housing needs and collaborated with other agencies to find homes and to assist the person with disability benefits, in order for them to sustain their housing. This was a proactive measure and many thanks to the former long-time administrator of Linn County Health Department in assisting with our area's homeless person's needs.

We have had some challenging cases in Albany as have many cities. For a few years and also during the downturn of the economy before our mental health department was able to get additional resources for case management, I had many people contacting me day and night that were not supervised under mental health management. This was a very tiring time for me, as I would listen to their concerns and try to provide guidance, but when a person is needing a better management of their medications, that was beyond my ability to help, so I could only encourage them to contact their case manager.

There was one lady who would call throughout a weekend, as she was seeing things moving around in her apartment and she had other personal issues. She was eventually evicted from her apartment, and I helped her two times find a new place to live. Each new place she lived, the same issues came up, and her neighbors and property managers could not seem to help. When any tenant complains to the property manager and threatens to move out, a landlord has no other choice but to evict the tenant as a last resort. The challenging issue with this tenant was she did not think she needed help and would not seek assistance through mental health services. She eventually moved out of town and it wasn't six months later that she had passed away. I always wondered why and how could someone's mind reach that state. This is another challenging situation for agencies to overcome and the need keeps rising. Our mental health providers are angels in what they endure in their working environment.

Another person I tried to help, as I knew his family, could not handle his mental health issues. He was the sweetest person, but once he fell away from his mental health management team then everything in this world was a conspiracy against him. Several years ago, he was held in jail for six months, and he finally was able to get stable and into housing. This past year he went back to his previous state of mind and he started threatening others and damaged property. He is back in the state mental health system and his future is unknown. This person was not only difficult for me to deal with but put high demands on our police and mental health departments.

As you can see, there is a need for the proactive measures our county health department has put in place that focuses on mental health management services to help a person be stable in their life. This is a cost-saving approach for government as it lessens the burden on law enforcement, the jail system, and overall health care costs, plus it benefits neighborhoods. But with these stories, sadly the cycle continues as each person's situation is different and the needs can change over time, but the only way to keep someone stable is with case management/supportive services.

### **Homeless Shelters:**

*As mentioned above in the Camp Boondoggle story about the changes in the practices of Helping Hands.*

Helping Hands Homeless Shelter was established by Pastor Les and homeless advocates in the 90's and their original location was at First and Main Street. This created some problems for the surrounding neighborhood with people coming and going all day and night. Our police department in the 90's had established a Community Problem Solving Committee and I was appointed to serve on it, when I was first on the City Council in 1997. The committee was to deal with community problems and the number one topic then was the issues surrounding Helping Hands Shelter. They reached their guest bed capacity at the location and we saw the need to solve the problem for the neighborhood by finding a larger place. Our committee researched shelters and visited some in other cities to see what their operational procedures were. We identified the biggest need was for a day-use center at the shelter for the homeless. Helping Hands Shelter was housing the homeless at night and then requiring them to leave during the day, and they had no place to go. This created many problems in the community with the homeless finding any public spot to hang out, which included businesses, libraries and even city hall.

It took us several years to find a new location for Helping Hands Shelter and eventually a building became available, where Santiam Highway and Pacific Boulevard unite at, which we called the Bermuda Triangle area of Albany. It did not take long for Helping Hands to reach capacity at that location there by creating overflowing issues. The operating procedures at the shelter were a hindrance to some homeless and instead lead to more camping in our natural areas like Camp Boondoggle. The day-use area of the shelter helped alleviate the problem of homeless hanging out in public spaces during the day but still lacked operating procedures and programs that met the needs of the homeless. The residents at Camp Boondoggle did not want to live at a shelter where persons under the influence of drugs or alcohol stayed. The same as any homeless person could not stay from too high of drug or alcohol consumption. Also, Helping Hands Shelter did not provide proactive programs that worked with the homeless to move them into housing. The volunteers were so overloaded in keeping the doors open that the shelter was more geared toward maintaining a homeless person's lifestyle. Helping Hands Shelter was not a desirable location in the community for a shelter as it was very visible from a

high traffic-volume street and it was a much blighted building. Also, pedestrian connectivity was insufficient and dangerous for the many residents going to and from the commercial areas.

After the shelter moved to this location, our Problem Solving Committee was disbanded a few years later and we established a Code Enforcement Team with city staff and legal counsel to deal with the ever rising problems of the homeless in the community. This included habitability housing code issues and blighted properties within the community. The team is still in existence and has been a successful program even today.

Helping Hands Shelter reached capacity in a very short time due to the operating procedures the shelter had in maintaining a homeless person's lifestyle, yet there was not the focus nor resources to move that person into housing. The board of directors at Helping Hands Shelter knew it needed a more functional facility for a day-use center and to provide programs to fully serve the homeless. They found an existing building to move to on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, at the bottom of the Pacific Boulevard overpass. This was a good move to have a more pedestrian friendly access to a facility and a location away from neighborhoods. But again, once the move took place the shelter reached capacity and was scheduling bed shifts to meet the growing need. From there, the effort was to build an addition on the dormitory to provide more beds. This was built about 2005 and again reached capacity soon after it was open. It fit the old saying: "You build it, they will come". The shelter was housing residents in the dormitory that was not completely constructed or yet held an occupancy permit. So in 2007, the board came to the City Council for a loan for six months from an old HUD housing fund to finish the dormitory and kitchen. The loan was to complete the additional wing and provide a separate section for women and families. We provided the loan to the shelter, which ended up taking seven years for the shelter to pay back.

This loan, opened the door for the City to seek better operating procedures for the shelter. The city had many complaints over the shelter for them maintaining a homeless person's lifestyle and not working with them to get residents into housing. In their defense, their resources and volunteers were stretched thin and their focus was to keep the doors open. In 2007, I was asked by Helping Hands Shelter's board to facilitate a meeting to discuss the operating procedures between the HH board and Samaritan Health Nursing volunteers. The volunteers had safety concerns over the operation of the shelter. This was a two-day process, but the outcome was a big step for the Albany homeless advocates in serving the homeless. The main accomplishment with the operating procedures was to not allow any drugs or alcohol in the shelter. This helped residents like Camp Boondoggle who would now stay at the shelter and also prevent a homeless person from using the excuse of not working with the shelter, so they could tent camp in our natural areas, as they would state many times they do not want to be around "druggies". Sadly even today a homeless person or panhandler will use that excuse to not stay at the shelter because of drugs.

As of today, the shelter has not needed to add capacity to the existing dormitories. They provide case management, work with the local agencies, follow the Homeless Housing Plan's goals and keep the residents within the capacity limits. The shelter is functioning quite well.

Since the shelter has established proactive operating procedures and case management programs, this provided an increase in contributions from the community and their fund raising efforts have been successful without seeking funds from the City. The shelter also provides hands-on-job training to the guests of the shelter. The guests can learn retail skills at a thrift store, gain garden and nursery experience, learn wood-cutting and food skills in the kitchen. Many success stories have come from the shelter, and we are grateful for the volunteers and supporters.

Another shelter that opened in the 80's in Albany is Signs of Victory Mission (SOV). SOV originally was located on 7<sup>th</sup> and Lyon Streets in an historic house. This shelter was much blighted and the management did not have solid management policies. SOV outgrew its location, and the management procedures are what brought the need for the establishment of Helping Hands Shelter, as stated above.

SOV established another location on Cleveland Street and also the duplex behind its Lyon Street mission. It also had another building for a short time by the freeway. George managed the mission and his sister ran the transitional houses. Unfortunately the guests took advantage of their generosity and the houses remain a continual problem in those neighborhoods, resulting in frequent police activity.

In the later 2000's, with strong encouragement from the City, our urban renewal program paid for a new owner to purchase and renovate the mission. This solved a large problem within the community as the mission was along the gateway to the downtown. But then SOV still owned a duplex on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue behind the house on Lyon Street and the police activity and blight continued.

In the meantime George was always available to assist the police in dealing with challenging homeless issues. He would contact homeless persons and invite them to his mission or even approach a panhandler. He assisted me many times in contacting a panhandler to offer them a place to stay. George around 2015 purchased a new location for the mission on Jackson Street across from the county jail. This was an ideal location for a shelter, as this was away from any neighborhood and situated in an industrial area. However, George struggled to get enough funding to finish the shelter legally to house their guests.

Finally in 2017, the City gave a loan to SOV to finish the shelter to keep overnight guests as the need was rising for overnight bed space for families. A condition for the loan was for SOV to sell the duplex on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The shelter was completed in the fall of 2017 and the duplex was waiting for a buyer as of March 2018.

SOV also had three houses on SW 4<sup>th</sup> that generated neighborhood issues and was very substandard housing. The building department deemed the houses as dangerous buildings and George sold the houses in February 2018.

Helping Hands Shelter and SOV's new shelter both have metal bunk beds and concrete floors, which are a great preventative measure to combat bed bugs and contributes to easy maintenance.

In the beginning of 2018, Albany had sufficient capacity in our local shelters, but keep in mind the demand for more or less changes with the economy. This is why it is of importance for persons wanting to help the homeless to donate to a local agency like the shelter, instead of giving money to a panhandler. A shelter truly helps the homeless and panhandling enables the homeless to continue their lifestyle.

### **Transitional Housing:**

In 2007, our first transitional housing concern arose in Albany and that was with an Oxford House Chapter. A wonderful caring leader of the Oxford House, Mike, purchased a home and rented to a Chapter. The Oxford House model is to rent a room for individuals in drug and alcohol recovery. Mike found houses to purchase that have above the normal amount of bedrooms and bathrooms than in a typical house, which homes in our historic district seemed to fit this need. This upset the Monteith Historic District neighbors, as houses were best suited for families.

In 2008, I met with the Oxford House managers and their neighbors to assist with establishing management procedures in order for the Oxford House to be a good neighbor. This helped meet the neighbor's concerns, but overall the neighborhood wasn't pleased with the upkeep and appearance of one significant historic home. I worked with the owner, Mike, to have an architect choose colors for the house to be painted and other changes to help the appearance of the house. As I told Mike, most neighbors do not know what happens inside a house, but they do see the outside.

This effort enabled the Oxford House Chapters to take a closer look at other locations and homes they chose before they purchased a house. It is important to have a home close to services as most of the residents do not have vehicles. The Oxford House model is very successful and receives no government assistance. A house runs under a democratic type structure and every resident has chores and rules to follow. Each resident votes for new members to join the house and also determines if a member needs to vacate. Each tenant is held very accountable for their actions.

In 2016, we started getting concerns over another transitional housing provider. This model was similar to the Oxford House in renting rooms to persons in recovery, but the on-site management was lacking some accountability for the residents. I met with the neighbors and the manager of these houses to look at their operating procedures. One procedure was to

establish a curfew for when residents needed to be indoors for the evening. The curfew at that time was 2 am and they had close to 20 people living in the home. As I stated to the manager, most neighborhoods do not have a house with 20 people coming and going until 2 am in the morning. Also, they worked on cleaning up their outside storage and appearance of the house. They had four refrigerators under their carport and a dining room set, which is not a common way to store items in any neighborhood.

The rise in transitional housing prompted the city to look at housing code violations. There were many ingress and egress concerns, plus some tenants were living in closets and a bedroom did not have a window as required by law. The building inspectors worked with the manager to bring the homes in to compliance with housing codes. Since we have been working with the transitional housing providers and even condemned the Fourth Street homes as dangerous buildings, the neighborhood complaints have declined the past year.

Also, Jeff became the new director of Chance (a recovery support agency) and he closely works with the transitional housing providers and he has greatly strengthened this organization, which provides supportive services for individuals in recovery.

### **Community Development Block Grant Funds:**

In order to receive federal funds for public services for the homeless and housing, Albany needed to be at the 50,000 population level. In the 2010 census, Albany was shy by 50 people, so we had to wait another year to apply for the funds. In 2012 we became an entitlement community and we now are able to have some funds for social service programs.

So far, these federal revenues have provided funds to Helping Hands Shelter to purchase a house and renovate it for occupancy. Also, funds have been provided to finish the Jackson Street Youth Shelter, which provides case management to teens and youth under the age of 18. Family Tree Relief Nursery, CARDV, FISH of Albany and Albany Partnership for Housing perform rehab projects to maintain Albany's affordable housing stock.

The CDBG funds have greatly assisted in the social service needs to support people experiencing homelessness.

### **Panhandlers:**

In 2013, our new police chief came on board and he listened to the community's concerns and complaints. At that time we were experiencing panhandling on many street corners and in parking lots, which was not just in Albany, but a nationwide problem. Also, we had homeless persons who were drunk and disorderly and hanging out in our parks, open spaces and business areas.

The chief looked at our existing ordinances and over a course of a year we amended two older ordinances. One was changing our “drinking alcohol in public places”, as it was challenging to enforce because an officer had to physically see someone drink the alcohol. This was changed to “no open container of alcohol”. The other ordinance was for using public spaces as a restroom. The ordinance was changed to include ‘no human waste’.

Then another new ordinance was adopted to prohibit any transfer of property from a vehicle to a pedestrian. This helped to prevent a panhandler from stepping off a curb to receive money from a vehicle, which was a safety hazard. Many panhandlers then went to businesses parking lots, where they were away from a public street. Our police department then worked with the businesses to have them sign a ‘no trespass order’ against the panhandler so they could enforce them to stay away from their businesses. These ordinances significantly reduced the homeless who were drunk and disorderly from hanging out in public spaces and panhandling.

I personally approached many of the panhandlers to discourage them from seeking money and instead to work with the shelters and agencies. The panhandlers knew the excuses to pacify most people and would ignore me after they knew I wasn’t falling for their excuses. The excuses they would use were: “The shelter has rules”, “I am not allowed at the shelter”, and a common excuse was “They have bed bugs”. *I will address the bed bug situation below.*

The above mentioned new ordinances and proactive measures extremely helped in Albany. Occasionally there would be a panhandler, who usually was on a substance, to be defiant and take the risk of a violation as they still wanted money to buy alcohol or drugs. Once the police have cited a violator several times, that puts the burden on the judge to apply more days of incarceration. Being in jail for a length of time helps assist them in sobering or detoxing. Before they are released from jail, they are encouraged to work with Chance or Oxford House, to assist them in a recovery program.

The ‘no transfer of property from a vehicle’ ordinance, also prevented panhandlers who were not homeless from scamming people for money. There was a lady who panhandled for almost a year, and I approached her two times. She clearly was not homeless and her hair was professionally done. I challenged her one day in misleading people with her story. When I challenged her the second time, a lady in a Prius car pulled up and handed her \$50 right in front of me. The panhandler grabbed the bill and put it in her pocket, while I am telling the driver “she is scamming you, as she told me she has an income of Social Security.” The panhandler just kept saying “God Bless You”. The poor lady in the car looked so confused as to who should she believe! When I left I told the panhandler “I hope you ask Jesus if he is proud of you in scamming people”. She saw me leave in my vehicle, which at that time displayed our police and fire bond campaign sign on my back window. It was frustrating to see someone taking advantage of giving people, but at least she has never been back. I did hear she was in a neighboring town a week later panhandling.

We did an additional outreach of discouraging panhandling throughout the community, which helped to minimize people giving. But also an outreach to let people know if they give to a panhandler they are enabling them to stay homeless and continue their substance abuse. This is actually harming the panhandler, yet the giver actually does not realize they are harming the homeless person and if they give money to them, then it is for their own self- satisfaction.

When the economy picked back up from the Great Recession our community had businesses in 2015 -2016 needing employees and mostly in 2017 employees found it extremely difficult to fill vacant positions. This made it challenging for panhandlers to find sympathetic givers, as many people told panhandlers to go get a job or they even offered to employ someone, yet some panhandlers denied the employment.

Our ordinance and proactive measures help reduce panhandling, but the economy and available jobs gave a message to panhandlers, that they needed to look at themselves as to why they were not working and the scamming panhandlers knew they lost sympathy from givers.

As of this day in 2018, we see very little panhandling in Albany compared to other communities, but it will always be a problem.

### **Tent Camps:**

Tent camping and hanging out in public places has always been an issue in dealing with homelessness. The police department to this day continually patrols our natural areas looking for new camps.

This takes huge resources in cleaning camps weekly between the police and parks department. If we do not enforce tent camping, then the camps will rise in numbers, as many larger communities are finding. Many giving people are unaware the blankets and clothing they donate to a homeless person ends up in illegal camps. This adds to the debris left in camps, and also the campers discard items along our natural areas.

Several years ago our police department purchased a Gator off-terrain vehicle to have quicker access in patrolling our natural areas. This has made it more proactive and functional for when someone is found along the natural area and they need to be processed at the jail. Also, it is time-saving in reaching the miles of natural areas and steep terrains.

A couple times the police department took me along to the areas to show me some challenging spots for them to access. As soon as a homeless person hears the Gator's engine, they hide. But before an officer had to patrol on foot or bicycle without any equipment, which was dangerous to the officer and not efficient with their time. I was amazed at the first time we went out on the Gator and all the camps had been vacated four days prior and sure enough someone had set up in an old camp area again. This is a natural hazard in these areas, mostly for fires because of the close proximity to structures and forest.

The second time we went out to one area that was not visible from the trail and very difficult for the officers to patrol. This will be a continuing effort in order to protect our natural areas. Our natural areas are for the public to enjoy the environment and for the habitat to thrive. These areas should not be where human feces is left, campfires burning off the wood in the area, and the discarded clothing, drug needles and trash that are left behind. Our natural areas are for the public to enjoy and they are not for someone's personal residence, let alone restroom.

An example, we looked over the Willamette River's bank and a tree hanging over the river bank had about a dozen shirts and pants hanging on tree branches, which were discarded from the homeless. Once the river rises, these clothes will be washed down the river and impact the environment, as it was too dangerous to remove the clothing. Plus this area is in the floodway and if our parks department doesn't continually clean up the camps, then every winter waste will wash down the river. This waste includes, metal, couches, mattresses, drug needles and all types of junk.

This also is a financial impact to our state fish and wildlife programs and our own parks department that funds personnel to go out and clean the camps and the dumpster fees to discard the waste. This amounted to thousands of dollars in 2016 that could have been spent on our parks maintenance equipment replacement. Instead it is funds being spent to clean up camps that many givers to the homeless provide for their lifestyle.

In Oregon, 2015-2017 saw a huge increase in homeless population from the rise in rents and many taking advantage of the higher rents to live the outdoor lifestyle. As they knew the awareness was on higher rents, it gave them an excuse to not better their lifestyle and live anywhere.

Thousands lived in public areas throughout Portland and Eugene. Once the available jobs were in abundance, people lost sympathy for the homeless and became disrespectful and showed a lack of sympathy for them in Portland. Portland waited until 2017 to start cleaning up camps and to this day, you can see tent camps are in between the freeway median and natural areas. Portland has spent millions of dollars in trying to clean up camps.

If Albany enabled tent camps and homelessness, we would be faced with the same challenges as other cities. We are fortunate for our goal of not enabling homelessness and strived to get a roof over everyone's head. If not for this goal, we could be seeing more persons losing their life to the extreme elements while living outdoors.

### **Bed Bugs:**

In 2014, the shelters and transitional houses were experiencing bed bugs. Mike who owned the Oxford Houses in Albany bought the special equipment to treat bed bugs. Bed bugs are an irritant to humans and do not carry any diseases, but they are very difficult to eliminate. A spray can kill live bugs, but the eggs can live for years in baseboards and furniture. In order to kill the eggs, an entire house or apartment must be contained and heated to 160 degrees for six hours. This is an expensive process.

The shelters and transitional houses started proactive measures for every new guest, who must turn in their belongings to be treated before they enter the shelter or house. This creates another excuse for someone to not stay at the shelter, as they do not want anyone to touch their possessions, but this measure is essential in controlling the bed bug issue.

The bed bug problem still exists in Albany and nationwide, even high-end hotels have experienced bed bugs. Another person who was homeless was able to start up a business in treating bed bugs. He offers tenants who are required to pay for treatment a payment plan. His business and another persons have been very proactive in controlling the problem. Even an older local motel that allows homeless to rent a room had to have their whole facility treated.

In 2017, we heard many apartment complexes were dealing with bed bugs, so the homeless no longer can use bed bugs as an excuse to not stay at a shelter or work with the agencies.

### **Housing Challenges:**

As stated earlier, the uptick in the economy brought on higher rents, so less affordable housing was available for low-income households. This will be a continuing need. The most challenging housing is for sex offenders. For decades, no community wanted sex offenders in their neighborhoods, but state law requires a sex offender to live in the county where he or she committed the offense. As in year's past, many sex offenders were released from prison and stayed in Salem, which was not fair to that community.

Helping Hands Shelter has several sex offenders who reside there. This prevents families from living at their shelter, so Signs of Victory serves more families. Also, women with children usually are able to receive housing vouchers over a sex offender, so they can find an apartment to live in. Some sex offenders stay homeless and many live throughout a community's neighborhoods. Currently Helping Hands Shelter is seeking to purchase some properties for sex-offender housing. Providing housing is not the only piece to serve this population. The oversight of case management is essential to make sure the offenders comply with their parole requirements.

Albany has three local non-profits (Albany Partnership for Housing APHCD, Linn Benton Housing Authority and Innovative Housing) that provide low-income rental housing. Innovative Housing owns one complex, Woodwind Apartments, serving tenants for work-force housing. Linn Benton Housing Authority serves seniors and people with disabilities. Albany Partnership for

Housing, which I oversee, serves families, seniors and people with disabilities. APHCD for the first time in its history since 1994, had to close its waiting list at the end of 2016. There were 400 people on the list and in 2016 only processed a few vacancies. APHCD saw an increase in vacancies in 2017, so this helped to fill the units with persons who needed the lowest rental housing in Albany, but that barely reduced the waiting list.

Currently, APHCD is seeking new projects to add more units to its portfolio. Albany had nearly 500 new apartments built the past five years, but they are for market-rate rents and not for low-income tenants. In 2018, we are seeing vacancy rates rise for market-rate units in Albany, but not for low-income units.

### **Homeless Memorial Day of Remembrance:**

Since 2000, the City of Albany has sponsored a memorial to remember those who died in our community from homelessness. This is a day of national recognition on the first day of winter, every December 21<sup>st</sup>. This is a special event and at first we had around 30 attend the memorial and the attendance has grown since. In 2017 we had 80 attend the memorial event.

Sadly almost every year there is someone we are recognizing at the homeless memorial that I knew was a panhandler or lived at Camp Boondoggle.

### **The loss of Camp Boondoggle residents:**

Rita Shelby, 2015

John Bradford, 2016

Fall of 2017 Daniel Wilkinson, lived 15 years at the camp.

Non Camp Boondoggle:

Loss of four homeless in the summer of 2015.

Michael Wilde, 2016. Michael and his buddy James Hedrick were the two people who caused neighborhood issues and we changed a few ordinances in order to assist the police with enforcement.

February 28, 2018, we discovered Robert Geiffels deceased under the Pacific Boulevard overpass, across from the Train Station. Robert was a long-time panhandler and was incarcerated many times to get sober. He was defiant in working with agencies and continued to stand on the same corner. Robert died due to the harmful results from people handing him money.

**In Summary:**

In Albany, we have agencies providing food boxes, free clothing, hot meals at area churches and three meals a day at the shelters. There is no reason for anyone to go hungry or let alone panhandle for money to buy food. We have the agencies to assist the homeless and shelters to help serve and those are the agencies where the contributions should be sent.

**Panhandling enables a person to stay homeless, yet giving is self-satisfying--but is harmful to the panhandler.**

**So as a City, we have worked hard to serve the homeless and for anyone to disagree, I ask what have you done to help the homeless? If you did help, was your effort helping to get someone into housing or enable them to maintain their homeless lifestyle?**

**We will never eliminate the number of homeless persons, but we can all work together on the same strategies to serve the homeless.**

*Written by Sharon Konopa*

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