Prescott Valley to offer 'a safe place' for homeless to feel welcomed

DEBRA WINTERS, Prescott Valley Tribune
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Hard at work are Mike Zywanski, president of A Safe Place, Jeff Young, owner/CEO of Granite Mountain Behavior Health, Prescott Valley Vice Mayor Lori Hunt, Dene Hunt, A Safe Place volunteer, Gill Stritar, A Safe Place board member, and Allison Lenocker, executive director at Coalition for Compassion and Justice. (Debra Winters/Tribune)

The homeless in Prescott Valley will soon have a free place to shower, grab something to eat, relax, and lots more thanks to a group of caring individuals with big hearts.

A Safe Place is a faith-based ministry started five years ago by Gil Stritar, co-chair. Currently it operates out of a minivan stocked with non-perishable food, hot/cold water, juice, Gatorade, clothing, toiletries, sleeping bags, tents and Bibles.

Approximately 85% of unsheltered people are living in their vehicles in Prescott Valley, said Stritar.

"We go around and make sure that they have the necessities they may need," he said.

The minivan is on the street Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 8 a.m. until they assist as many people as possible, year- round including holidays. The route is modified from time to time, and the people served are of all ages.

"It's very humbling to be a part of this," said Mike Zywanski, co-chair of A Safe Place.

Positive changes came when A Safe Place partnered with Quad City Christian Church, located in Prescott and Prescott Valley, on Jan.1, 2023.

"The church was looking for a very strong source to do community outreach with. They donate money and collect canned goods," Stritar said.

Stepping Stones Thrift Store has also offered a lot of help donating clothing, as well, he said.

Then in June 2023 a significant opportunity came their way when Jeff Young, the owner/CEO of Granite Mountain Behavior Healthcare offered them space free of charge where A Safe Place will be physically located at 2nd Street in Prescott Valley.

"I thought it was a good idea to lease the vacant barber shop with no initial intent for its use but I felt spiritually what it should be used for. After some brainstorming this is where we are now," said Young.

And with Granite Mountain Behavior Health located next door, it's the perfect spot. They offer outpatient assistance for mental and behavior health concerns such as anxiety and severe mental health illness, social determinants of health such as employment issues, and housing to name a few.

"Visitors will have access to mental health and substance abuse services. We're there to provide a variety of services," said Young.

Advocates from Coalition for Compassion and Justice (CCJ) and Catholic Charities, both out of Prescott, will also be on hand to assist homeless individuals connect to services for such pertinent necessities as health benefits.

"They will feel like a human being again. It's all positive," said Vice Mayor Lori Hunt.

There will be no cooking done on premises. Some other amenities that will be offered include a laundry facility, small food pantry and clothing, as well as a nice place to sit down especially during rain or excessive heat.

"It actually will be very helpful to those going on job interviews," Zywanski said.

Some items they still need donated include a microwave, sofas/chairs, lamps, tables, kitchen table/chairs, desks/chairs, computers, and laptops, cases of water, and non-perishable foods.

They're also looking to have a hairstylist come in on certain days, as well as partnering with a dental clinic. Those details and others are still in the planning stages.

Donations of gift cards from Walmart and similar stores and fast food entities will also be accepted. Donations of any kind can be made through the website.

The opening date is still to be determined, Zywanski said, but organizers hope it is in March.

For more information, go to asafeplacepv.org.

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