

Community

One woman's quest to change outcome for addicts

By Ian Lidster
Special to the Echo

If you're not part of the problem, you can become part of the solution.

That sentiment was at least part of the motivation that guided Lise Carignan in her quest to provide a place of safety for Comox Valley residents who had been "part of the problem" but wanted more than anything to move away from a former self-destructive reality.

"About 10 months ago my Courtenay rental home became vacant," Carignan says. "I had intended to just rent it out again. But one morning while in quiet contemplation an idea came to me so suddenly and lucidly it took me by surprise. The message was this: 'This house has to be a clean and sober house for men coming out of recovery.'"

Carignan had already learned via conversation, as well as the Comox Valley Homelessness Study, that such a resource was desperately needed, so that recovering addicts and alcoholics could transition into long-term change and become productive members of society once again.

"Most people come out of treatment all gung-ho and willing to do whatever it takes to stay clean and sober," she says. "Unfortunately, so many of them also

right back to the unhealthy lives, homes and families they'd just left weeks earlier. The environments they came from will so often break down their resolve within a brief time period."

Bearing that in mind, Carignan decided that if these same individuals were given a chance to change their environment, the outcome could, indeed would be more positive.

"I thought if they were surrounded by a support network that encouraged their new way of living, and a physical home containing people with a common goal to turn their lives around, then maybe some miracles could happen," she says.

So, once she had made her decision, even if she did doubt her sanity at moments for having decided to undertake such a venture, she said things started to happen within days. In short order she had volunteers prepared to paint, clean, rake, and deliver.

"Donations of paint, lawn equipment, furniture, flooring, linens and dishes started coming my way," she says. "I was also given some direction as to whom I might be able to speak for a bit of assistance and guidance in doing this."

As it turned out, she got a great deal of assistance and guidance, for which she remains eternally gratified in making the newly-christened Bees' Nest, a reality.

"My friend Gary Pawlak freely gave me three solid months of his time painting, doing errands, repairing everything he could and, most important of all, welcoming the first few men into the house and helping them feel at home," she says.

Making this happen was no small undertaking, Carignan says, and again her gratitude is extended to those who

"I get a lot of calls from men needing a place to live when they leave the security of their treatment centre."

stepped in and gave her valuable assistance, including Carl Johansen for all the heavy work, Bob (The Builder) Dehaas for his help with some of the renovations, Shawn Wilson of the Salvation Army for donations of linens and furniture, and many others, such as Home Depot and the ReStore, and especially to the residents of the house who continue to make it all work.

"It took a couple of months for the home to be ready for tenants," Carignan says. "This was a bit unnerving because the bills and mortgage payments were sit-

ting on my VISA card."

"I get a lot of calls from men needing a place to live when they leave the security of their treatment centre, but at this time I only have four beds," she says. "And all of them are full. Eventually, through prayer, persistence and help from others who share this vision, there will be six beds available. And, who knows, ultimately maybe house Number Two. At this point I must ask others to step up to the plate."

In that, Carignan is asking the Comox Valley community to assist in co-creating and helping to maintain a safe and caring home for men in early recovery.

The clients who need help, via the conduit of Lise Carignan, are males, age 19 or over, who have successfully completed chemical dependency treatment within the last 30 days or who have 60 consecutive days clean and sober. The clients must have a recovery plan in place, and doing all that is needed, such as regular attendance at 12-Step meetings and are totally abstinent from drugs and alcohol. Clients must also be actively seeking secure employment, must be able to participate in house activities and must be able to afford their part of the rent each month. Any departure from the aforementioned criteria will result in eviction from the house so that the space may be

made available to another.

The quandary in which Carignan finds herself is that the total of \$1,740 collected for rent each month falls short of operating expenses. Should a client move out, there is no way for her to recoup that loss of rent. As it stands, the monthly revenue does not cover necessary repairs, upgrades, and so forth.

Her wish-list for the house is extensive, but is not luxurious, it is mainly items and upgrades necessary to keep the place going and to bring a 900 square-foot proposed expansion up to code.

"The advantages of the upgrade would include an improved ability to meet monthly bills, due to the increased revenue from new tenants. Should a room become temporarily vacant, the facility can keep functioning, and the rent for the hard-pressed residents could be reduced to \$400 a month from the current \$435.

"The most important aspect of the request," Carignan says, "is that it is an opportunity for the community to band together to play a part in helping to solve a serious problem in the community, and to aid in providing six rooms for men on the road to recovery from addiction.

■ For more information on the Bees' Nest project, please contact Lise Carignan at 250-400-1140, cell 250-218-1602, or liselight@shaw.ca.