Lizzie Affonso at work on A Home To Share.

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# Unique housing opportunity launching

A Home To Share (AHTS) is an integrated community living opportunity where adults with intellectual disabilities can live together with their non-disabled peers in a cooperative family environment of harmony, comfort, safety and dignity. This format is not only unique to Sisters, but also to Central Oregon and possibly, even Oregon as well.

AHTS is now taking applications for potential residents of the community, called Mary Ellen's Place. For more information or an application, contact Sandy Affonso, co-founder, at 541-588-6231, visit www.ahome toshare.com or email info@ ahometoshare.com.

Mary Ellen's Place will host its grand opening on May 1, at 506 S. Spruce St. The Sisters community will be invited to come, be a part of creating this community through shared living.

A Home To Share has been established as a 501(c)(3) organization. All contributions made to AHTS are tax-deductible. To make a tax-deductible contribution, send a check to P.O. Box 2068, Sisters, OR 97759.

much of her position, Foote-Lewis is actually employed by the nonprofit Economic Development for Central Oregon (EDCO). That separation from local government is a key, built-in feature of the position: While government is supposed to be transparent, private-sector businesses do not want to expose themselves to public scrutiny.

"Their business is private and they want to keep their privacy," Foote-Lewis explained.

That means that Foote-Lewis can offer little in the way of specifics about the companies that are interested in Sisters — until they actually make the decision to relocate.

The three likely prospects are all manufacturers. One of them, she said, is energy-related.

Sisters is beginning to develop "clusters" of business types that are successfully taking root.

Mohr Solutions, a recent arrival, works in the field of energy, creating emergency capacity. One of Sisters' most-successful companies, ENERGYneering Solutions, Inc. is continuing to expand as it designs and operates powerplants in areas far-flung from Sisters.

The recently renovated Sisters Eagle Airport is becoming a hub, and the company Innoviator Flight Science is evidence of the kind of company Sisters can attract because of it.

Preston Thompson Guitars is also expanding its custom-guitar-building operations.

Foote-Lewis provides resources and information to businesses interested in locating here and for businesses that are working hard to stay here and grow. Identifying suitable properties for a business operation, linking up with access to capital and workforce housing and development, identifying eligibility for incentives and acting as a liaison between businesses and the City planning department are all aspects that roll into the work.

Retention of existing businesses is as important a part of the effort as business recruitment.

While her work is focused on the traded sector — businesses that create products or services that go out into the broader regional, national and international economy — Foote-Lewis is also available as a resource for people in the retail or service sectors.

"I do assist companies that are looking to locate downtown who need resources," she said.

Foote-Lewis also keeps up with regional or statewide issues that can have an effect on business in Sisters, from legislative initiatives (positive or negative) and the looming three-week closure of the Redmond Airport for tarmac work.

Though Foote-Lewis was hired to work part-time, the job actually entails full-time effort.

"It's flexible, which is nice as a mother of two boys," she said. But that means being available when businesses need her to be — including evenings and weekends.

"I run it kind of like a business," Foote-Lewis said of the position.

The Sisters City Council concurred at a workshop last Thursday that the position ought to be full-time.

While Foote-Lewis is seeing significant positive signs of increased business activity and interest, she notes that it can take a long time for a company to move from the initial contact to an actual move here. Any kind of move, especially a full relocation, is a big deal.

"It's a long-term commitment," she said, estimating that it can take three to four years for recruitment.

And Sisters continues to have challenges, some of which are built in. Sisters is a bit off the beaten track and more distant than Redmond from air, highway, and rail shipment.

Sisters also has relatively high land prices and restrictions on how land can be built upon.

"Businesses want to come, but they don't necessarily want to build," Foote-Lewis said.

What is really needed, she asserts, is "flex-space."

"We're starting to get some traction there," she said.

And, she noted, "housing is an issue." Workforce housing — affordable for purchase or available for rent— is scarce in Sisters.

Foote-Lewis is quick to point out that she is a facilitator, not the engine of the local economy.

"I don't create jobs and I don't bring people to Sisters," she said. "The businesses do... It's the businesses that make the business decisions. I provide them with resources and information."

For more information, contact Foote-Lewis at 541-977-5683 or caprielle@ edcoinfo.com.