

# Family in Salem still displaced more than a year after the purchase of a meth-contaminated house

By Connor Radnovich  
Salem Statesman Journal

**SALEM** — More than 16 months after the Tubbs family unwittingly bought a meth-contaminated house, they are still sleeping in trailers and living out of a former chop shop on their property.

Travis and Denay Tubbs envisioned this two-acre spread near Jefferson as the future epicenter for all family gatherings — Thanksgiving chief among them — but that dream is going to have to wait another year.

In the coming days, professional cleaners will start on the main home, and with any luck, the space will be ready for the family of nine by Christmas. Then the renovations that are already underway in the other buildings can begin in the house.

Some good things have happened in the last few weeks.

In late October, the family settled its lawsuit against the real estate companies and agents who sold them the home without telling them about its drug past. The settlement will be enough to pay for the clean-up, but not the renovations.

Starting this month, Wells Fargo bank is deferring their \$2,000 per month mortgage payments until April.

And as of last week the Tubbses' belongings are finally out of storage and piled in the shop: boxes stacked eight feet high, nine mattresses, wooden furniture, dozens of black garbage bags and an untold number of toys and board games.

Beyond the cramped

quarters, missing possessions and laborious renovations, their predicament has helped Travis and Denay drive home a timely message for their kids.

"We might not have a house we can live in, but look at all these other things we have," Travis said. "That's the whole point of Thanksgiving, to reflect on what you really have to be thankful for."

The family plans to spend the day in Portland with Denay's family, but sometime this week they'll have a big dinner of several chickens they raised this year and donated food they have kept in boxes and bins.

In particular, OFD Foods donated more than \$1,000 worth of Mountain House freeze dried granola and blueberries, spaghetti, chicken fried rice and Italian pepper steak.

Greg Hoggard, controller with OFD Foods, said the company rarely deals directly with consumers, but this was a special case that fit in well with the company's mission. Travis is also a friend.

"I know that they've been suffering for awhile. Just to see them smile, it was a nice experience," Hoggard said.

It's one of dozens of examples of community members, friends and strangers who offered their support, particularly after the family's plight made headlines this summer.

The Tubbses' purchased the home in July of 2017, only to find out afterward it was well-suspected in the area as a hub of illicit activity, including methamphet-

amine use.

Travis is a U.S. Air Force major and now a full-time student at Oregon State University on track to become a biology instructor at the Air Force Academy. The family moved from California so he could complete a three-year PhD program.

When they had the property tested, all 28 samples registered above Oregon's methamphetamine clean-up level. The lowest amounts were three times that level; the highest (in the ventilation system) was 150 times higher.

Meth contamination doesn't leave obvious residue or odor, so even walls that appeared clean were unsafe to touch. It wasn't just the walls and ventilation — window sills, floor tiles, door frames and practically every visible surface were contaminated. The last building left to clean is the house.

There are still plenty of clues to the property's past as a suspected meth compound — wall studs charred by stolen electricity flowing through shoddy wiring, an old burn pile (adjacent to the illegal septic system) that includes the remnants of syringes and the occasional needle.

Cleaning was quoted at \$84,000, renovation at \$500,000.

Practically every member of the family — including kids in age from 2 to 14 — has pitched in on rebuilding the house. The oldest ones recently tarred the shop's roof so all the family's belongings don't get soaked.

There are plenty of people offering to help with the

renovations, too.

Denay's step-father Steve Donnelly, who lives in Portland, visits the house periodically. He used to work in construction and as an electrician, which makes him very useful with running wires, cutting outlets, putting up drywall and a host of other tasks.

He figures he will be in Jefferson three or four days during his two weeks off for Thanksgiving, his 3-pound Bichon Frise, miniature poodle mix Sugar in tow.

Donnelly is happy to help out, especially since he sees the kids getting a good lesson in work ethic. The free food is a nice perk, too, he joked.

But Donnelly said that if this were his house, the situation would have been a bit different.

"This would have been a struggle for me to do," he said. "I would have probably just sold it."

The week before Thanksgiving, three representatives from Home Depot in Albany toured the property to see what they might be able to do to help.

The house needs everything from smaller items like door handles, light fixtures and paint, to an entire kitchen, flooring and appliances. That's not including the installation time and cost.

It's still early in the

process, but it's likely that Home Depot will be able to find nonprofits to donate at least some of those items, said assistant manager David Napoli.

Napoli also volunteered to get some safety harnesses for the kids to use when they're tarring the roof.

Home Depot employee April Morrice said that for as tough as the family's living situation is — and it's bad — she was moved by their positivity.

"It doesn't matter your situation, you can choose to be optimistic," Morrice said. "It matters if you want to wake up happy or wake up miserable. It's a choice, and they've made it."

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