

# FROM DEATH TO LIFE

A downtown mortuary building becomes a healing center

New life is invigorating a former mortuary in downtown Eugene as the Trauma Healing Project transforms once dark, windowless rooms into vibrant spaces for activities that promote healing and recovery.

The former casket display room is becoming an acupuncture lounge. The old embalming room will serve as a staff kitchen and meeting room.

The Trauma Healing Project, a nonprofit organization that provides alternative solutions to survivors of trauma, is moving into the former mortuary at 11th Avenue and Charnelton Street because its previous landlord, Lane County Behavioral Health, needed its space back.

The Trauma Healing Project was established 14 years ago to respond to the unmet needs of trauma survivors in the community, says Elaine Walter, its executive director. They accomplish this by providing wellness classes, meditation and acupuncture clinics.

"We wanted to create something that wouldn't require people to be involved in the mental health system and wouldn't give people a diagnosis or a label," she says.

The mortuary building has been around since the early 1900s and was originally a convent associated with St. Mary's Catholic Church. Most recently, it was occupied by the Poole-Larsen Funeral Home, but has been sitting empty for a number of years.

The owners eventually want to turn the property into apartments, meaning the Trauma Healing Project will have to move again.

ELAINE WALTER INTRODUCES VISITORS TO THE TRAUMA HEALING PROJECT'S NEW DIGS



"It's a temporary place for us. It's a rent rate we can manage in comparison to the growing market rate," Walters says.

Walters says the organization has been allowed to do some inside remodeling to suit its needs and clear the remnants of the former funeral home. The alluring history of the building has provided interesting experiences in the renovation process.

"We discovered windows and doors that have been paneled over," Walters says. She gestures to a door that appears on one side of wall but not the other because another wall had been plastered over the entrance.

Each room will be transformed — from a place of sadness to one of healing. The main entrance is tall and open, and the outside wall features some of the few windows in the building. The blurred glass allows natural light to stream through and lightens up the newly painted bright green and white walls.

In what was once the funeral staging room, a giant gold chandelier hangs from the ceiling, complemented by two wall chandeliers in the front. Walters says the large chandelier will be taken down and replaced with modern light-

ing. The room itself has no natural light; so small windows were cut in the wall closest to the entry room to create a brighter feeling.

Walters says that some people have been wary of housing the organization in a former mortuary, but felt better after visiting the building themselves.

"It actually feels welcoming and good," she says. "We have done a lot of work to clean the energy."

Most of the inside of the building is covered in plush light-green carpet, which sits in stark contrast with the dark brown wood-paneled walls. After walking upstairs, Walter shows the light orange and cream half-walls they put up to designate office space for their seven employees.

Walters is unsure what the future will look like for the Trauma Healing Project during its temporary relocation.

"It's as terrifying as it is exciting," she says. "It's an unknown, and the price tag for our next move just feels daunting."

As soon as the dust settles, Walters says, the project will begin to look for a more permanent location, because two years is not a long time. Until then, they will keep working to make this building a life-filled home. ■

## SLANT

• **What's with the Confederate flags flying from a business near Florence** over the weekend? A Eugenean friend of ours asked the Florence Chamber of Commerce that question, prompting this reply: "Florence welcomes all visitors. The seasonal vendor you mention is not a chamber member and unfortunately we have no influence over them. Florence is a wonderful community made up of loving people. I hope you were able to enjoy our shops and river views."

• **The city auditor story in Eugene** is a tale of power, personalities and probably fear of what an independent elected auditor might find and suggest. It was no surprise that Councilor Betty Taylor's motion to put a new elected auditor measure on the November ballot failed July 9 with only two votes, hers and Emily Semple's (see our story at eugeneweekly.com). Most of the players say the Eugene voters clearly want some kind of auditor, considering the votes for the two measures on the May



ballot, and other anecdotal evidence. But it seems unlikely that a truly effective auditor, like so many other cities have, will spring from this mayor, manager and staff and City Council. What's the next step?

• **The craziness of soccer rules keeps coming out in the World Cup in Russia.** For instance, when the Croatian player

who scored the goal that temporarily put them ahead against Russia tore off his jersey to celebrate, he got an automatic yellow card. At the same time, the players are beating each other up and nary a yellow card is flashed. Then there's the cruel shoot-out that has ended so many matches in this World Cup. Isn't there a better way to find a winner? Oh well, it's only a game! Follow along with our soc-

cer coverage out of Russia by Eugenean Killian Doherty at eugeneweekly.com.

• **What we're reading:** a long article from the June 2018 issue of *The Atlantic* magazine called "The Birth of the New American Aristocracy." Matthew Stewart writes about the 9.9 percent who hold the most wealth in a country where the class divide is already toxic and becoming unbridgeable. We don't agree with everything he says, but it is provocative and points to some action to take.

• Summer is here and EW's hallways are filled not only with staff, but on some afternoons, their kids. **What are you doing with your kids now that school is out?** Got suggestions for your fellow readers? Send us a letter to letters@eugeneweekly.com.

• While we're fortunate to have Congressman Peter DeFazio and senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley working for us in D.C., **our greatest challenge is the November election**, only four months away. That means money, phone calls, letters, door-knocking. As Sen. Elizabeth Warren keeps saying, it's time to raise our voices louder and louder.