



Photo by JOEY CAPPELLETTI of Keizertimes

CAMP: 'It isn't something I'm proud of.'

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To a passerby, the encampment looks like a makeshift junkyard. Nearly three dozen abandoned cars and RVs have accumulated over the months, with junk filling in the gaps. Scattered throughout the derelict vehicles, however, are homes of the unhoused.

Sara, the woman with the entrapped RV, has been living at the Indian School Road encampment for the past four months. She is a survivor of domestic abuse and said she became homeless earlier this year after leaving her abuser.

Sara and Tim did not want their locations revealed to others and asked that their real names not be used in the story. Both names are pseudonyms.

Having worked as a home caregiver in the past, Sara said she's been looking for work and housing for months. She said Simonka Place, a Keizer-based women's shelter, has been full whenever she's inquired.

Kathy Smith, the director of Simonka Place, said the shelter has turned away 659 women and 279 children from September 2020 to August 2021 due to being at capacity.

Sara said a friend gave her the RV a couple of months ago "just so I'd have a roof over my head." Like many of the residents of the encampment, Sara's RV is her only protection from the unforgiving Oregon winter. If she's unable to move it, she said she'll have no choice but to live on the sidewalks in downtown Salem.

"They are going to take our homes away from us and then we will just be bodies on the street," Sara said.

Tuesday, Nov. 16 at 10 a.m.

Residents cram belongings into the back of their cars. Hoods of cars are popped throughout the camp — owners leaned over engines that haven't started in months. One couple yells out in relief as their car sputters to a start.

State and local officials dispute that the clearing of the camp was sudden. Angela Beers-Seydel, a spokesperson for ODOT, said that officials notified campers through camp postings on Nov. 2.

While two no trespassing signs are visible, there are no postings at the camp that indicate residents were warned of the removal before Nov. 15.

The agency said the camp needed to be cleared because "we had received concerns from the farmer that access to their farm was repeatedly blocked and concerns from Chemawa Indian School about the safety of their students following police activity at the site."

Delores Pigsley, chairman of the Confederate Tribes of Siletz Indians, said that she's tried to have Indian School Road cleaned up for months. Pigsley said that the camp has become a safety concern since students returned to school in September.

A groundskeeper at the school was attacked by a homeless person earlier this year, according to Pigsley, and two of the school's buses had their windows smashed. The encampment sits just outside of the school's fences and less than a half-mile from the Chemawa Cemetery.

"It's a concern for the students but also I have family buried at the cemetery and I want to feel safe when I park and go into the cemetery," said Pigsley.

While Pigsley wants the camp dispersed, she also wants the couches, mattresses and other trash that lines Indian School Road to be cleaned up.

"It's not the homeless," said Pigsley. "Two guys in a pickup were dumping a mattress the other day. They were dumping it out the back of their truck."

She added, "I do feel bad about the homeless people. They need to be punished but someone needs to help them, they can't just keep moving them and moving them. If you don't have a place to go to the bathroom or throw your garbage, they throw it on the ground. It's not just their problem, it's our problem."

Tim, whose bike I'd asked to take a photo of earlier, doesn't dispute that trash has overtaken Indian School Road.

"Not all of us do this messy (expletive). I think it's filthy, ya know, I personally try to help clean up whenever I come around. But that is something they'll need to control if they do want to be accepted anywhere," he says.

But Tim says that a lot of the trash that lines Indian School Road hasn't come from campers.

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brainfood

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By Charles Preston

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