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Camp from A1

develop their own growth with assistance," said Buckwald.

Though plenty of work will remain to be done when Camp Alma opens its doors, Buckwald estimates they are set to have core facilities up and running in about two months' time for the initial entry of five veterans.

"We're really close," Buckwald said. "We need a dormitory, we need a kitchen and we need a laundry room. And we're pretty close to each one of those."

The first five residents of the camp will be carefully picked.

"We want to be able to build the community off them," said Buckwald.

The nonprofit is looking particularly for homeless veterans in Lane County who will commit to a tiny housing program which will see the construction 10 tiny homes over 12 months.

As the operation matures, plans are to increase the resident occupancy to 50. The 105-acre plot of land features a complex consisting of dormitories, a kitchen and dining area, a lounge, a library and laundry facilities amid a serene, pastoral setting.

The camp will offer skills in gardening, food preparation, food preservation, construction, maintenance, basic financial management and job interviewing.

In setting veterans up for post-camp reintegration, Veterans Legacy plans to help with preparation for employment, job training, forming business plans and planning higher education.

From work camp to veteran housing
The work camp first



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

A chicken coop constructed from an old flatbed houses 14 chickens at Camp Alma, providing a degree of self-sufficiency the nonprofit is aiming to make thematic to the therapeutic camp.

began operating in 1990 under the auspices of the Lane County Sheriff's Office and, besides a two-year shutdown from 1995 to 1997, the camp provided a rural work setting for county inmates until 2008.

Buckwald, originally from Mapleton, returned to Lane County in 1988 from a stint with the Air Force and was hard-pressed to find a meaningful direction in his life. After working his way through some basic labor jobs, Buckwald found employment with the sheriff's office, working in corrections.

In 1991, Buckwald came to Camp Alma, which was known as the Sheriff's Office Forest Work Camp at the time. He soon learned that inmates coming through the camp had talents and skills.

"Going through the files out here, I found out all my guys had been convicted of growing marijuana," Buckwald said. "So I made them my gardeners."

In assigning inmates to work he thought would fit

them, Buckwald found that they would often put in 10 or 12 hours a day.

"Not because I made them, but because they took that ownership," he said.

At its peak occupancy, the Forest Work Camp was a 100-inmate operation filled with inmates whose crimes were relatively minor.

"It was a lot of the smaller stuff," said Buckwald. "It was driving without a license, DUIs, probation violations, thefts, forgeries — that type of stuff."

Conceptually, in approaching the issues of the men remanded at the camp, Buckwald believed strongly in giving second chances and providing pathways to error-correct, positioning people so that they might right themselves.

"I truly believe that some people don't get arrested, they get rescued," he said. "But not everybody who comes to jail needs to stay in jail, either."

The camp was known to provide community benefits as well. For the Whiteaker Free Community Thanksgiving Day Dinner, an annual neighborhood feed in Eugene for those in need, inmates provided desserts.

"These guys probably made about 3,000 cookies and they loved doing it because they loved giving back," Buckwald said. "There was nothing else like it. Nothing."

Buckwald feels the camp provided an opportunity for many to turn their lives around.

"This place gives you time to think. And even when we had 100 inmates out here ... we didn't have a lot of graffiti or vandalism because these guys built everything out here," he said. "They painted the buildings. They poured the concrete. They grew the flowers and the vegetables. So there's a lot of ownership."

That ownership extended to individuals' lives as well.

"It was an unbelievable opportunity because guys were coming out here and they were learning life skills," said Buckwald. "They were learning work ethics."

A downturn in the economy changed all that. The recession of 2008 caused deep cuts in the budget for the sheriff's office. While parts of the main jail were being closed and deputies were laid off, the camp simply couldn't justify operations and closed that same year.

Shortly after, it was given back to the county.

It would be nine years before the camp saw care, maintenance or interest in bringing it back to life.

Enter Veterans Legacy.

"We had a vision of what this place could be," Buckwald said. "If we did so many positive things with the inmate population, I really think it'll be tenfold with a veteran population."

In spring of 2017, the nonprofit made a rental agreement with the county for \$100 a year, securing the deal in light of the cost

See ALMA 8A

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