

Home *from A8*

ing spoke to the issue as well.

“Is this going to fix our housing crisis? No, but it’s definitely a start,” he said, as he called for more projects of the kind SquareOne is advancing.

Though the residents of Cottage Village have barely begun their new lives in the co-op, there is already palpable impact on the new arrivals.

Future resident Aislinn Blackstone, 41, had effusive praise for the project and those spearheading it. For Blackstone, it presents to her a new lease on life.

“I wish there was a way to properly thank them,” she said, restraining her emotion.

addressing a well-known housing problem in Cottage Grove. The city’s 2018 Housing Needs Analysis identified a deep need for more housing availability at all income levels. Creating affordable housing has been a particular challenge.

“When we first started this project and started applying to the city, we were told we were the first application for low-income housing in 15 years,” said Kelsh. “So, that kind of tells you what the issue is.”

At the Sept. 18 ceremony, Mayor Jeff Gow-



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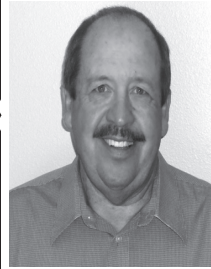
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CVC member Susan Johnson (right) presents housingwarming gifts to new Cottage Village resident Fawn Love (center) on Sept. 18 as part of the ceremony.

Blackstone said she is on disability and living out of a trailer on her parents’ property, a situation owed to a complicated history of medical issues that began in 2006. She has since been through numerous hospitalizations and invasive medical procedures which have left her in a mode of physical and psychological recovery that has hampered her quest for independence.

“I’ve forgotten how to live like an adult in a lot of ways,” she explained. “I’m on a very, very limited budget. I’m very much living month-to-month. And so being able to afford a place of my own was a dream I just completely dropped. ... I’ve put so many things that I’ve wanted to do and dream of doing on the backburner.”

With her newfound sense of agency, though,

Blackstone is looking forward to focusing on thriving rather than surviving. For the first time in a long while, she said a future seems tangible.

“It feels like I’m actually going to have one,” she said. “There is a part of me that’s sort of scared to dream big, but I don’t want to close myself off, either.”

Eager to return to past passions such as writing and photography, she hopes to use her stability to pursue endeavors she’d given up on.

“It really brings this sense of ownership and pride,” she said.

Socializing, too, will become part of her life again.

“I’m really excited to have neighbors to work with and talk with and just be a community with,” said Blackstone.

The Cottage Village project is still not over, however.

Four more houses and a community center have yet to be completed on the property.

“We need to raise about \$300,000 more to complete the whole project,” said Kelsh, who hopes to have residents into the final four houses by the end of the year.

While the project finishes up, momentum is already building for similar models to be implemented.

Looking to the future, Dellinger hopes to find more efficient ways to create affordable housing in the area.

“For so long, affordable housing has been about tax credits,” she said. “It’s just not a good use of funds.”

Dellinger is hopeful that more housing projects like Emerald Village and Cottage Village will help chip away at perpetual problems such as homelessness and families living on the edge of financial ruin.

“Getting people together who care about moving it forward — that’s the biggest thing,” she said.

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