

Legacy from A1

group is taking a unique and visionary approach to treatment, stressing “therapeutic agriculture” and construction projects which are intended to lead wayward veterans down a skill-driven path of personal ownership and agency.

“This is going to be an opportunity for people to find themselves and develop their own growth with assistance,” Buckwald said.

Buckwald has deep roots with the camp. He first came to Camp Alma in 1991, which was known as the Sheriff’s Office Forest Work Camp at the time, as a corrections officer.

His 13 years spent at the camp taught him that inmates were capable of applying talents and skills given the proper environment and motivation.

After securing a deal with the county to purchase the 105-acre plot of land, Veterans Legacy began putting its vision to work.

Today, the camp offers homeless veterans the chance to restart their lives.

This February, just as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning to make waves, Buckwald felt enough of the camp’s core buildings and facilities met the requirements for a trial run and Veterans Legacy began taking in homeless veterans.

“When the world shut down, we opened up,” Buckwald said.

The nonprofit followed up on references, took cold calls and eventually brought in seven veterans to put the camp’s services to the test.

While living spaces were provided for free, the temporary residents were expected to contribute about four hours of work per day to the camp’s general maintenance and various projects.

Gardening, food preparation, food preservation and

construction offered not just purpose but structure in day-to-day life.

“It’s a chance to be something more — a part of something bigger than themselves,” said Buckwald.

The camp also hosted work parties which involved working with volunteer civilians and learning skills such as how to make salsa, tamales and can food.

“They’re meeting really good folks in a good manner in a good environment,” Buckwald said. “There was a real sense of brotherhood and family.”

In addition, Camp Alma keeps two donated fire trucks on site which provide veterans with the requisite training to handle a fire should one break out.

At the core, though, Buckwald feels the benefits of learning to setting boundaries, feeling secure and finding purpose have profound impact on the veterans.

“Just that reset of not worrying where you’re going to put up your tent,” he said.

The work itself, Buckwald said, is nurturing and therapeutic.

“There’s something right about getting your hands dirty and working the land, harvesting, growing your own vegetables — doing something other than for yourself,” he said.

During the trial run, each veteran stayed for varying lengths of time and each brought with them their own particular challenges. With ages ranging from 33

to 64, the veterans’ different histories and different needs forced Buckwald and volunteers to be adaptive in finding solutions.

The oldest veteran, for instance, came in with cardiac issues, pneumonia, a bleeding ulcer and a core temperature which had dropped to 83 degrees.

“I really think we saved his life because he gained 35 pounds,” said Buckwald.

The veteran had no ID, either, so the team helped him through the process and saw him on his way to getting a banking account.

In all, seven men “graduated” from the program, meaning most left when they felt ready to move on. Although one was asked to leave, Buckwald found the pilot project to be a success.

“Each one of these guys, they all left better than when they got here,” he said, adding that he has followed up with each of the members to track their success.

While the veterans were learning how to reintegrate, Buckwald said learning the idiosyncrasies of working with people conditioned by homelessness was a task in itself.

“There was a lot of learning on both sides,” he said. “For us, it’s a chance to sit back and take a look at what worked and what didn’t work.”

While no vocational training is offered on the site yet, Buckwald is looking to gradually expand services after the camp reboots.

“We have the potential to

be so much more out here,” he said.

Buckwald envisions veterans at Camp Alma splitting their time between work, counseling and working on long-term goals. Skills like financial management and job interviewing practice could be provided by volunteers, he speculated, but the camp’s reopening will depend heavily on securing the funding for a case manager.

Though Buckwald originally imagined veterans could stay at the camp as long as they needed, he’s come around to realizing everyone who comes in needs an exit strategy.

A case manager would thus ensure goal setting and clearer trajectories toward moving the veterans back into society.

Other services such as drug and alcohol counseling, mindfulness training and cognitive behavioral therapy are on the camp wish list as well, though the successful inclusion of these programs will require plenty of future partnerships, funding and manpower.

In the meantime, Buckwald is eager to get more veterans back on the land to start working toward that future.

“I think there are lot of different things that we can do out here. And if nothing else, at the end of the day we can provide hope that tomorrow is going to be a better day,” he said.

For more information, visit the Veterans Legacy website at veteranslegacy-oregon.org.

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Calvary Baptist Church 77873 S 6th St • 541-942-4290 Pastor: Riley Hendricks Sunday School: 9:45am Worship: 11:00am The Journey: Sunday 5:00pm Praying Thru Life: Wednesday 6:00pm	Hope Fellowship United Pentecostal Church 100 S. Gateway Blvd. 541-942-2061 Pastor: Dave Bragg Worship: 11:00am Sunday Bible Study: 7:00pm Wednesday www.hopefellowshipupc.com “FINDING HOPE IN YOUR LIFE”	St. Andrews Episcopal Church 1301 W. Main • 541-767-9050 Rev. Lawrence Crumb “Church with the flags.” Worship: Sunday 10:30am All Welcome
Church of Christ 420 Monroe St • 541-942-8565 Sunday Service: 10:30am	Hope In The Grove Baptist Church 77820 Mosby Creek Rd Pastor: Wayne Husk Worship: Sunday 10:00am Evening Bible Study: Wednesday 6:30pm 541.649.1043	Seventh-day Adventist Church 820 South 10th Street 541-942-5213 Pastor: Kevin Miller Bible Study: Saturday, 9:15 am Worship Service: Saturday, 10:40 Mid-week Service: Wednesday, 1:00
Cottage Grove Bible Church 1200 East Quincy Avenue 541-942-4771 Pastor: Bob Singer Worship 11am Sunday School: 9:45am AWANA age 3-8th Grade, Wednesdays Sept-May, 6:30pm www.cgibible.org	Living Faith Assembly 467 S. 10th St. • 541-942-2612 Worship Services Sundays: 9a & 11a Youth Worship Sundays: 11a (all ages welcome) Mondays: 5:30p (6th-12th grades)	Trinity Lutheran Church 6th & Quincy • 541-942-2373 Pastor: James L. Markus Sunday School & Adult Education 9:15am Sunday Worship 10:30 am Comm. Kitchen Free Meal Tue & Thur 5:00pm TLC Groups tlccg.com
Cottage Grove Faith Center 33761 Row River Rd. 541-942-4851 Lead Pastor: Kevin Pruett www.cg4.tv Full Children’s Ministry available Services: 9:00am & 10:45am	Non-Denominational Church of Christ 1041 Pennoyer Ave 541-942-8928 Preacher: Tony Martin Sunday Bible Study: 10:00am Sunday Worship: 10:50am & 5:30pm www.pennoyeravcoc.com	United Methodist Church 334 Washington 541-942-3033 Worship 10am umcgrove.org
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