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Compassion House to build new facility

By Chantelle Lusebrink

Compassion House officials are used to getting down and dirty to help families in need.

From renovating the Rainier House in a hurry to house its first family in 1999 to moving and restoring a historic downtown Issaquah home to its new site, they've renovated homes the hard way several times.

But in their latest venture to expand their services to families in transition, Compassion House officials are doing something they've never done before — building new, from the ground up.

"We've been given and remodeled the first two homes, moving one to its current site, and we've learned a few things from those experiences," said Tom Bilbro, president of the Compassion House board. "Building a new duplex seems to be the better and easier route in this case."

The vacant land Compassion House owns, adjacent to its Monti House at 250 S.E. Andrews St., will be developed into a two-story duplex.

Since the Monti House has been in full operation for nearly nine months, it is the perfect time to get moving on raising roughly \$650,000 to develop the new 2,600-square-foot project, Bilbro said.

Compassion House was founded in 1998 by the Rev. Mark Miller with support of his church, the Mountain Creek Christian Fellowship, in response to local families who were struggling as a result of financial burdens or traumatic personal experiences.

The organization provides transitional housing as well as offers physical, emotional and spiritual support from a variety of volunteers with skills and experience.

"If you look at the need that exists, there is a broad range," Bilbro said. "We are uniquely positioned to meet a little slice of that need for people that have found themselves in situations where they can't maintain their housing and that we think, with the right assistance and support, can turn around and become independent again."

"We're excited. There are so many calls every week from people needing transitional housing," said John Williams, executive director of Compassion House. "We currently have two units, but to be able to double that is very exciting."

In its first rendering, the new duplex is a two-story building with two separate units, each containing three bedrooms.

The first level is designed to accommodate families or individuals with special needs and disabilities.

“It will be the first facility that we have that will be in ADA (American with Disabilities Act) compliance so that we can help clients with disabilities for the first time,” Bilbro said.

The second level will contain a second three-bedroom unit with separate living facilities as well.

The only living space tenants will share is laundry facilities, which will be located on the main level of the duplex.

“Some people argue sharing space is a good way to promote accountability,” Bilbro said. “But I think all the places we’ve talked with, it is pretty clear that sharing space isn’t the ideal arrangement.”

A conference or meeting room for the organization is included in the design plans of the new facility.

“Right now we’re, what they say, pushing a wet noodle. We have all the plans but not a lot of money, and we’re looking for volunteers to help write grants and help us put this all together,” Williams said.

Two groups this month are hosting fundraisers for the project, the Mountain Creek Christian Fellowship and the Elks.

“So far, the community has been very responsive, and we’re looking forward to continuing our work with our neighbors and community in this next project,” Williams said.

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