

Blessing in disguise for former Larwill resident

Former Larwill resident is comfortable in new housing

By THOMAS DOOHAN Staff Writer Published: July 29, 2015 4:00AM



WOOSTER -- "That trailer park shutting down was a blessing," said former Larwill Mobile Home Park resident Electa Hupp, after reflecting on her time in the community and her subsequent departure.

Hupp, just like all park residents, was effectively evicted from the property July 6 when Wooster shut off its water. Owners Richard and Carolyn Lawrence failed to pay the water bills for the last five years and owe the city over \$200,000.

The shut off displaced about 40 families. Wooster elicited the help of Wayne Metropolitan Housing Authority and other social service agencies and worked to find housing solutions for those who needed help. Hupp, who moved into the park in March, just a few months before the notice of the shut off, said she was one of those residents and she is glad she decided to get help.

"I'm in a better environment," Hupp said, noting the Housing Authority, Liberty Center Connections, Community Action Wayne/Medina and a group from the Wooster chapter of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul came alongside her and assisted with getting her a place at Martin House -- an apartment complex for the elderly and disabled in Ashland.

Hupp said the Larwill Mobile Home Park was not a healthy place to live. In addition to high crime rates, she said there was very little privacy. At any given hour of the day, even when she was sleeping, people would wander into her home. Hupp said she even had items stolen.

"It's much safer," she said of her new home, noting the facility has security cameras and the main doors are locked in the evenings.

Hupp said she left the park with her wheelchair, her clothes and a few other things. However, with the help of St. Vincent de Paul and the other faith communities, her apartment is fully furnished.

"God blessed me through them," Hupp said, explaining how she believes she was at the park at just the right time to facilitate her moving into the new place, which she called the nicest place she has ever lived. Of the social service agencies and churches that helped her, she said, "they are angels in disguise."

Housing Authority Housing Choice Voucher Program Director Tara Baker said many churches responded to the agencies' call to action similarly to St. Vincent de Paul. She said one congregation that took on the challenge was

Wooster Grace Church.

Baker said small groups of people at the church rallied around several of the residents. For example, she said, one woman who lived at the park had an apartment lined up for after the shutoff, but had no way of furnishing the place.

Baker said the folks at Grace Church coordinated and were able to find her a bed, bedding, chairs, dishes and everything else needed for a new apartment.

"It was Tara Baker that really started us down this path," said Steve Kern, one of the church's associate pastors.

Once the need was assessed and that information was relayed to the church, he said its different small groups gathered financial resources, donated furniture and developed "ongoing relationships that we hope will be a blessing to the individuals."

"We love the people in our county," Kern said, adding the effort to help the residents of the park was a response to the teachings of the Bible. "Jesus himself teaches a love for all people and we want to find a way to demonstrate that in appropriate ways."

Kern said there are many entities that took charge in assisting the folks at the park. He commended the social service agencies and the Housing Authority's leadership, saying, "They have done well with a difficult situation."

Baker said the community's compassion for park residents was far reaching, extending beyond agencies and faith communities.

She said the landlords stepped up and offered to provide housing for those in need. She said one landlord, Harry Hunter, was able to house two of the residents and has been a good community partner.

"The two people that I took from the trailer park are very, very nice individual people," Hunter said, explaining renting to them was a natural decision. "I will rent to them for a lifetime if they want. They are that kind of people."

He said he uses the Housing Authority for several of his rental properties and explained how the agency is good to work with, as it backs landlords up and pays fair rent.

While he expressed gratitude for the agency and all it does, Hunter reiterated the successful housing of the residents at the park is not an achievement one entity can claim.

"The whole community pitched in to help these families," Hunter said.

Reporter Thomas Doohan can be reached at 330-287-1635 or tdoohan@the-daily-record.com.