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## How a once-seedy North Hollywood motel has become a model for helping the homeless

By Dana Bartholomew, Los Angeles Daily News

NORTH HOLLYWOOD >> Three decades ago, a faith-based group bought a seedy truckers' motel and bar in North Hollywood and turned it into the San Fernando Valley's first emergency shelter for homeless families.

Now LA Family Housing Corp., which runs the 250-bed Valley Shelter, will soon raze the former Fiesta Motel and build a \$40 million hub for permanent supportive housing, health care, integrated services and homeless outreach to the entire Valley.

Groundbreaking for the 80,000-square-foot Campus at L.A. Family Housing is set for May, with construction expected to take 18 months. The 30-year-old Valley Shelter, being celebrated during a going-away party today, will be replaced this spring by a "bridge housing" center for homeless families and single adults nearby.

"I'm beyond excited," said Stephanie Klasky-Gamer, president and CEO for the \$16 million nonprofit agency, during a tour of the facility last week. "I'm excited for the community at large – the clients we're working with daily, and our staff.

"This is a life changer, much like Valley Shelter 30 years ago was. Everything we focus on now is to place people into permanent housing."

### MORE THAN A ROOF



The single men's area at the Trudy and Norman Louis Valley Shelter.  
PHOTO BY DAVID CRANE, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

It was March 1986 when the Valley Interfaith Council turned a dive bar and truck stop on depressed Lankershim Boulevard into the Valley's first homeless shelter, serving 40 families.

Neighborhood opposition to the '50s-era Fiesta Motel makeover had been fierce. But the need for shelter for an estimated 5,000 Valley homeless residents then – and today – were great. The renovated lodge, city officials declared during a jubilant ceremony, would be a model for the entire nation.

That year, L.A. Family Housing, which had provided affordable housing in South L.A., took over what became the Valley Shelter. In the past 30 years, it has provided a roof for more than 150,000 homeless residents.

Since then, however, the model for housing homeless residents has changed dramatically. Once, it was enough to provide a shelter and meals, a model that could become a revolving door for a growing number of chronically homeless residents, officials say. Now, it's to provide a stable apartment and the tools needed to keep them off the street for good. And to help break a cycle of poverty.

“The site that we’re on right now represents a strategy to end homelessness over the last three decades, from a good night sleep into rebuilding your life,” Klasky-Gamer said, gazing across the two-story motel, which, mated with a three-story addition and dorm, houses 250 adult singles. “What’s evolved is giving people services – and in the past five years a very strategic focus on placing them into permanent housing.”

## A NEW MODEL

L.A. Family Housing, now in the vanguard of the countywide push to help solve homelessness, owns 22 apartment buildings, most of them in the Valley. In 2000, the agency had 175 units; it now has 600. By 2018, it expects to operate 200 more, with an annual success rate now pegged at 92 percent.

Its workforce has ballooned to 175 employees, including many who work full time to guide residents into support services and to find scarce, affordable apartments across Los Angeles.



Stephanie Klasky-Gamer, president of L.A. Family Housing, says she’s “beyond excited” over the project. DAVID CRANE – STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Permanent supportive housing – tied to a range of integrated mental health, medical, substance abuse and job services provided by nonprofits – now costs roughly \$22,000 a year per person, half of what it costs in homeless emergency room, jail and other costs, Klasky-Gamer said.

The new Campus at L.A. Family Housing aims to serve as a new model for homeless services across the region – and will be the first to consolidate apartments, a dozen support service agencies and coordinated homeless outreach for the entire Valley. As such, it replaces the regional drop-in centers proposed by Los Angeles County a few years ago, which ran into stiff not-in-my-backyard opposition.

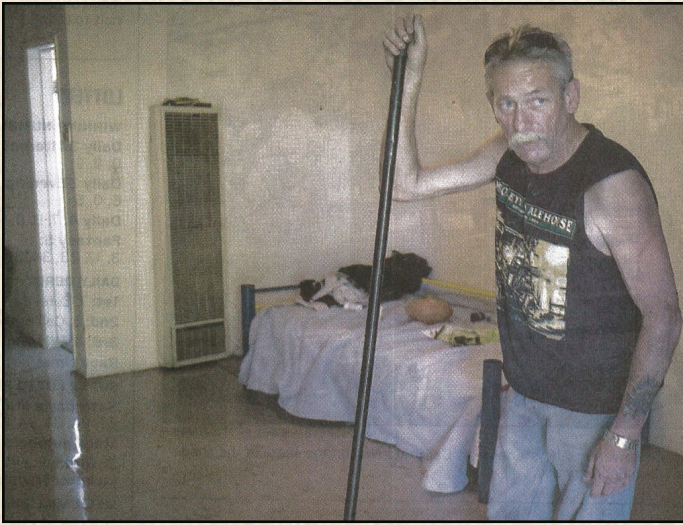
The former Fiesta Motel, which opened in 1957, will be replaced by a gleaming complex of glass and earth-tone panels, surrounding a series of landscaped gardens.

The new Campus will include 50 units of permanent supportive housing, a 6,000-square-foot health care clinic run by Northeast Valley Health Corp., and offices for a range of nonprofit services, from mental health counseling, job skills training to housing placement.

It also will serve as an L.A. Family Housing hub for its new role in coordinating the Valley’s homeless services.

A former shelter for families just down Lankershim is now being remodeled to provide temporary bridge housing, with 55 “crisis units” for 13 families and 175 singles as they wait for permanent supported homes. It will open before the Valley Shelter is torn down.

## A PLACE TO CALL HOME



Nick Soden will be one of the last residents to live at the Trudy and Norman Louis Valley Shelter on Lankershim Boulevard in North Hollywood. The complex will be demolished and replaced by a new facility.  
PHOTO BY DAVID CRANE, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

On a recent day, many were wistful at seeing the old motel go; it has served as a community for decades of Valley homeless residents.

“We’ve allowed people the space they’ve needed to go through changes,” said John Horn, vice president of programs, who began as a shelter intern 26 years ago. “They’re now moving into their own apartment any day. Valley Shelter represented a heart. We care for people who we’re serving.”

Inside one of the graffiti-covered rooms, Nick Soden mopped a battleship linoleum floor, his single bed one of the few features in the former motel room.

Two years ago, the 54-year-old house painter tumbled 25 feet off a ladder, breaking his back, his kneecaps and other bones. Then his house trailer was evicted from a yard in Sun Valley. Faced with high medical bills and no place to live, he ended up on the street.

Like many who live and work at Valley Shelter, he just wants another home to call his own.

“Been here about a month,” said Soden, dipping his mop. “It’s all right. Better than sleeping outside.

“I just want to get my medical taken care of, get on my feet, and get back to work.”