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## Reno's Veterans Guest House: Growing with the need



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**RENO, Nev., (KOLO)** Perhaps the best way to explain Reno's Veterans Guest House exists is to consider what would happen if it weren't here. to those vets and their families who have to travel here to get medical care.

Most don't have to travel nearly as far as Paul Bellia. He had been living in Latin America. He's been staying here since February receiving treatment for prostate cancer.

"I'd probably be getting ready to die," he says of the availability of the Guest House, "because I'm at stage four prostate which is about as far as you can go and I would have been at least immobile and a lot of other not so nice things."

He may be an extreme example, but things aren't easy for those who have to travel here from most of northern Nevada and eastern California and look for lodging for days, weeks, even months.

"What we find is that people will either decide I will not get the care because I don't have the money to come and stay or get a place to stay or they are going to live in circumstances that aren't safe," says the Guest House's CEO, Noreen Leary.

More than 20 years ago, the staff at the V-A hospital noted some outpatients or their families were living in their cars while getting treatment. The solution was the guest house.

Funding was raised locally and in 1994 a small home next door to the hospital was purchased. It offered just 4 beds, but eventually it was torn down and a new 12 bed guest house was built.

The need kept growing and so has the guest house. The latest expansion brings the capacity to 33 beds with a huge kitchen and dining area, lots of sitting and reading space and welcoming bedrooms.

"Because it's so large it's looking like a small hotel," says Leary, "but it has the comforts of home."

It's open to any veteran receiving outpatient care or their families whether it's at the V-A hospital or elsewhere in town as long as they live at least 30 miles distant.

A small donation is expected, but not required. During all those years of operation they've rarely had to turn anyone away and, if they are at capacity, the Sands Regency has often comped rooms for the overflow.

The need is expected to grow and the guest house has purchased property next door for future expansion.

None of this would have happened without the community's support. The Guest House receives no public funding. In fact this \$4 million dollar expansion was paid for through donations.

"And we're the only one of its kind that we've been able to locate," says Leary, "and that says a lot for this community.">

Others help in many ways, cooking meals, volunteering. It's a community effort and Saturday, the public is invited to take a look at what they've been able to accomplish.

The open house is scheduled for one to three PM. The house is located at 880 Locust Street.