

CA -- SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY HELPS HOUSE 34 VETERANS IN 30 DAYS

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, JOE NELSON, STAFF

Cash-strapped and homeless, former Marine Darrin Snyder arrived in San Bernardino County in August, family in tow, following a cross-country trip from Virginia Beach.

"When we first came out here, we were basically living out of a cargo trailer and a tent at different campgrounds or in the Wal-Mart parking lot," Snyder, 49, said.

Through the local nonprofit KEYS, Snyder and his family received vouchers for temporary stays at various motels. They are now residing at the Thrif-T-Lodge in Redlands.

On Monday, the Snyder family's luck took a turn for the better when a Realtor Snyder had been in contact with announced Snyder was clear to move into a five-bedroom, three-bath house in Victorville with a three-car garage.

Snyder, 49, couldn't be more ecstatic. He now not only has enough space for his two daughters, granddaughter and future son-in-law, but also his wheelchair and other equipment he uses to accommodate his disability.

"It takes up an entire room of a house, and now I have a nice garage to put them in," Snyder said of his equipment. Snyder suffers from two blown knees, a herniated disc and other ailments, including diabetes.

From Oct. 11 through Thursday, the county and its partner agencies placed 34 veterans into permanent housing during Operation Reville — a rapid rehousing program for veterans modeled after programs in Tampa and St. Louis. Snyder was one of several veterans who attended a recognition ceremony Thursday in a conference room at the Behavioral Health Department honoring the Realtors and partner agencies that have worked with the county in its continuing efforts to end veteran homelessness.

“We said, ‘Why don’t we try and house one veteran a day for 30 days and see how it goes, and we were able to house 34,’” said Tom Hernandez, the county’s homeless services manager.

Philip Mangano, former executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness under former President George W. Bush and CEO of the American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness, has been working with the county the last two years on its homeless programs. He was the one who pitched Operation Reville to the county and its partner agencies.

“You basically upgrade everything you’re doing for a concentrated period of time. You concentrate the resources, and the intent is to get as many veterans housed in as short a period of time as possible,” Mangano said.

While the county and its partners consider the effort a success, more veterans still are in need of housing.

“We have about 85 total we still need to house,” said Karen Young-Lowe, CEO of Colton-based Lighthouse Social Service Centers, one of the county’s partner agencies.

The goal is to have all 85 housed by year’s end, Young-Lowe said.

Vietnam War veteran Wayne Owens, 61, was a reeye gunner during his tour of duty with the U.S. Army from 1974 until the war’s end. For nearly 20 years, he has called the streets of San Bernardino County his home.

Like Snyder, Owens has been provided temporary housing at the Thrif-T-Lodge in Redlands, but on Thursday, he received good news from Crystal Chavira, a housing specialist for KEYS: A property owner in San Bernardino was ready for Owens to move into a back unit at his house on Massachusetts Avenue on the city’s westside.

Furthermore, Lucky Buy Appliances in San Bernardino has agreed to fully furnish Owens’ new residence with two couches, a dining room set, bed and a television set, Chavira said.

Owens still was trying to wrap his mind around the idea Thursday.

“I haven’t had a place to call my own home for 20 years,” Owens said. “I’ve lived on the street, in a car or have stayed with others, but now, finally, I have a place — with my name on it.”