

Young: Redtail Ponds offers window of hope

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(Photo: Coloradoan library)

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Regardless of one's station in life, the view is spectacular — the snow-covered Front Range, open space for miles. Confections for the eyes from a gentle elevation at Fort Collins' southern end.

"A million-dollar view," Fort Collins Housing Authority CEO Julie Brewen calls it.

Not to downgrade scenery, but for the [people at Redtail Ponds](#), the more stunning view is four walls of their own, a lock on the door, a bed and a place for one's belongings that's not a backpack or garbage bag.

Add to this support services downstairs for those with substance abuse or mental health issues, plus referral for whatever this community can do to get people moving in the direction we all expect to be traveling.

Speaking of travel: A corral of bicycles is on the patio, and the South Transit Center of TransFort is within walking distance.

Redtail Ponds, a four-story development of 60 apartments, is demonstrating that the best thing to be done for the homeless is not soup or pallets on a barren floor, but a place to assemble one's life in peace.

Assembled with the help of federal and state grants and assistance from Summitstone and Catholic Charities. It's emblematic of the truth that the way to successfully combat homelessness is every which way we can. Players like the National

Alliance to End Homelessness factor into this amazing result.

You may have been conditioned by the mantra, “Government is not the solution; it’s the problem.” Consider this, though: Over the last four years the oft-maligned Department of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and local and state governments has managed to reduce homeless among veterans by 50 percent, [as reported by Mic. Com.](#)

Several Redtail Ponds residents are veterans who have used housing vouchers from this federal initiative.

The housing is considered “permanent supportive.” Residents pay 30 of their income in rent. The objective, of course, is to make them financially independent and to be the “support” they need today.

The apartment complex is a study in calculation, from phasing in residents to saving dollars and studying what has worked best elsewhere. Brewen sent her staff all over the country to see what works best. Now that it’s here, some observers have designated Redtail Ponds as such a place. It has won national awards for excellence.

Brewen stresses that though the place and location look great, this isn’t one of those “spare no expense” endeavors.

“The design is beautiful, but we made a lot of design decisions for long-term sustainability. We’ve got to operate with tight operating budgets,” she said.

Occupancy is full. What next? Another comparable development, Brewen said. The city is examining options for doing something similar elsewhere.

Can we afford these things? Of course we can, in part because when we don’t do something long-term about homelessness the long-term costs are staggering.

Federal figures show that each homeless individual ends up costing a community \$40,000 a year in services ranging from incarceration to emergency room treatment and more. It costs roughly \$15,000 to house and direct someone toward services

that could turn his or her life around.

A window with a view is wholly secondary to what self-sufficiency looks like.

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