Land trust assists Tahoe residents with affordable housing

By Kathryn Reed

A desire to do something for his community.

That is how the now 10-year-old St. Joseph Community Land Trust came into being. Lyn Barnett learned about land trusts at a planning convention in 2001. He was convinced during a lecture that a land trust is what Tahoe needed.

“A lot of long-term renters were asking for help because people were turning rentals into vacation rentals,” Barnett said.



At the time Barnett was working for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Patrick Conway was the housing coordinator for South Lake Tahoe. Together they researched land trusts to figure out how best to form the local one. At the time there were about 100 in the United States, mostly on the East Coast. Now there are close to three times that number.

Creating a land trust to serve both sides of the state line made it the first bistate trust. It is also faith based, which is not unusual for trusts. Barnett has long been affiliated with the Catholic Church. One benefit for the group is the free office space at St. Theresa Church.

But when it comes to who is on the board, who is helped or who may donate, religion is not part of the equation.

“Our mission is primarily housing, but also housing education, and education that helps people with basic skills in financing to help their overall knowledge to better themselves,” Barnett told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Our primary goal is to help low and moderate income people, but also the general public through education training.”

(See note below about financial workshop.)

The land trust is the majority owner of Sierra Garden Apartments in South Lake Tahoe. The 76-unit complex is all affordable housing. No one has to pay more than 30 percent of his or her income.

Barnett said there is a four-year waiting list for the one-bedroom apartments, and a two- to three-year wait for the two-bedroom units.

Residents are able to serve on the six-member board of the trust.

Barnett’s measure of success for the land trust will be when a majority of the board members are residents. Now one of the six is a resident. He wants the people to have more of say in what goes on with their living quarters.

St. Joseph Land Trust also built a house on Tallac Street about four blocks from Lake Tahoe. The group was the first to do so under TRPA’s moderate housing guidelines.

It was then sold to someone who fit the economic guidelines. The trust owns the land it’s built on. The house must always be sold to someone who meets the moderate-income qualifications.

“The general perception is that the housing market is affordable. But it’s not to locals. And we also have depressed wages,” Barnett said. “Incline is high on our target list. They really see need up there.”

But he said it’s hard to convince businesses that it is good for them to have workers live locally. So they don’t give to the land trust, which could help provide affordable housing.

“In the future I would like to see more partnerships. If the economy is truly indeed improving, people need to know we exist and we can potentially help with their housing needs,” Barnett said.

Working with the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity is a possibility. They could do the rehab work on a fixer up that the trust would buy and then sell to a qualified moderate-income buyer.

A summer workshop geared toward seniors to teach them how not to be a victim of fraud has been talked about.

More information about St. Joseph Land Trust may be found online.

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Note:

The free financial education workshop at Lake Tahoe Community College is Feb. 25 from 6-8pm. The focus will be on financial goal setting, budgeting, money savings tips, and basic bank accounts. The speaker is from Wells Fargo Bank.

RSVP to (530) 541.4660, ext. 741 or email Alee@ltcc.edu. Space is limited. The event is in Room G4. St. Joseph Community Land Trust and LTCC’s Student Support Services are sponsoring the event.