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VA site open to nonvet lodgers?

Rehab complex plan challenged

BY DANA BARTHOLOMEW
Staff Writer

NORTH HILLS — A sober-living center planned for homeless disabled veterans is drawing fire from politicians and local residents for potentially allowing nonvets and drinkers at the VA Sepulveda campus.

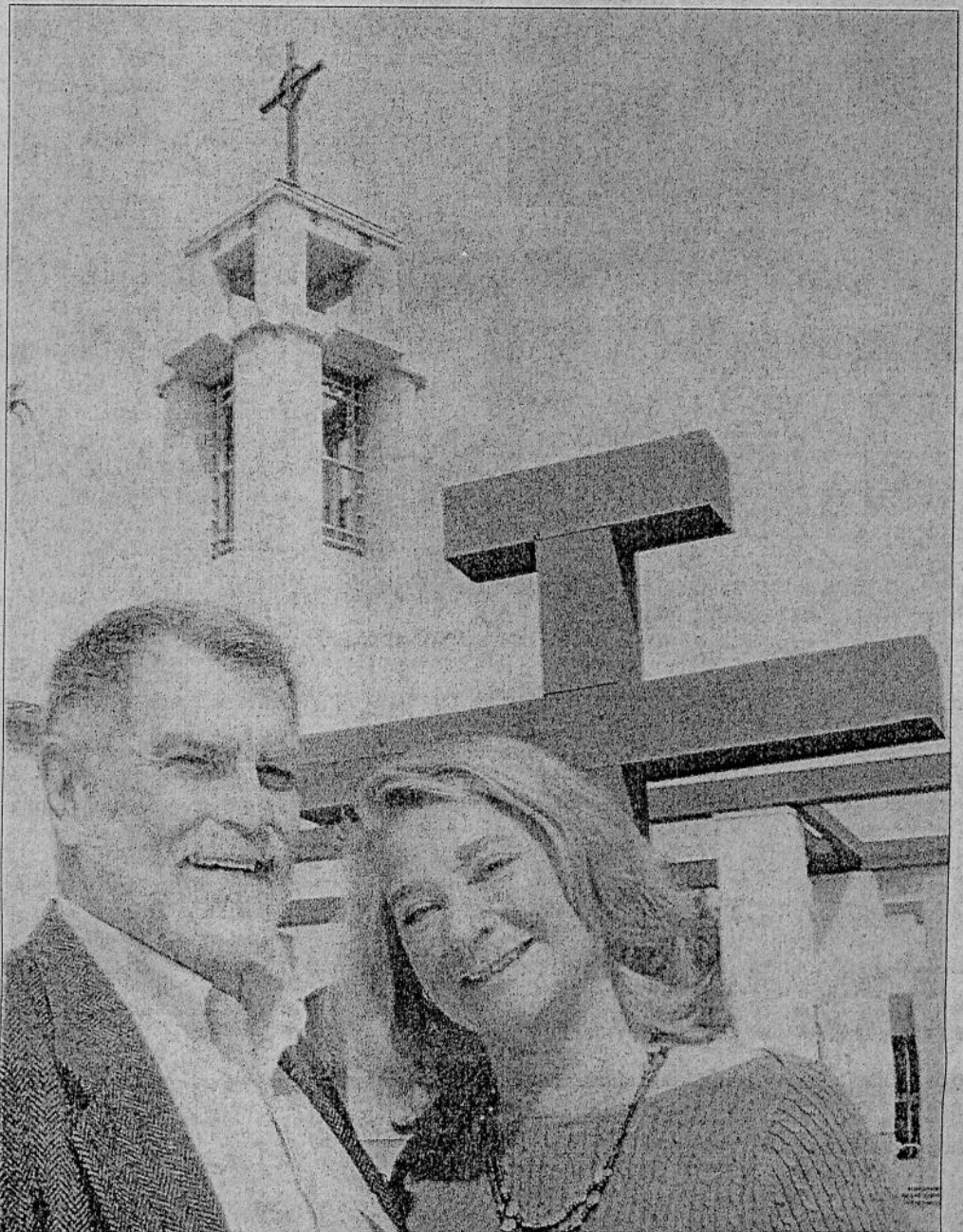
New Directions, a nonprofit veterans services agency, has a long-term contract pending with the Department of Veterans Affairs to open a 147-unit housing and rehabilitation complex at its VA Sepulveda Ambulatory Care Center.

But Rep. Brad Sherman and City Councilman Greig Smith said New Directions has broken a promise to limit its program to veterans only.

In addition, they say federal funding guidelines for affordable housing cannot restrict long-term residents — many recovering from substance abuse — from popping open a beer.

SEE VETERANS / PAGE 12

Married priest making history



VETERANS: Suit threatened

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Sherman is expected to introduce a bill next week to require New Directions to ensure a vets-only, alcohol-free facility.

Smith said he might recommend a lawsuit if the VA Sepulveda — zoned exclusively for veterans — permits nonveteran housing without public input.

“To be free to house vets or nonvets, to have keggers on a Saturday afternoon or not, they’re in the process of renegeing on promises made to the Valley community,” said Sherman, D-Sherman Oaks.

“I’m dedicated to vets, to homeless vets. ... The VA land is not an asset to be used for nonveterans’ problems.”

Lease not revealed

What especially galls Sherman, Smith and some North Hills West Neighborhood Council members is a refusal by the VA or New Directions to reveal the contents of what is believed to be a 75-year lease.

The lease, drafted in Washington, D.C., was approved by VA Secretary Jim Nicholson on March 8 and is expected to be made final next month. Veterans officials in Los Angeles did not respond Friday to a request for comment.

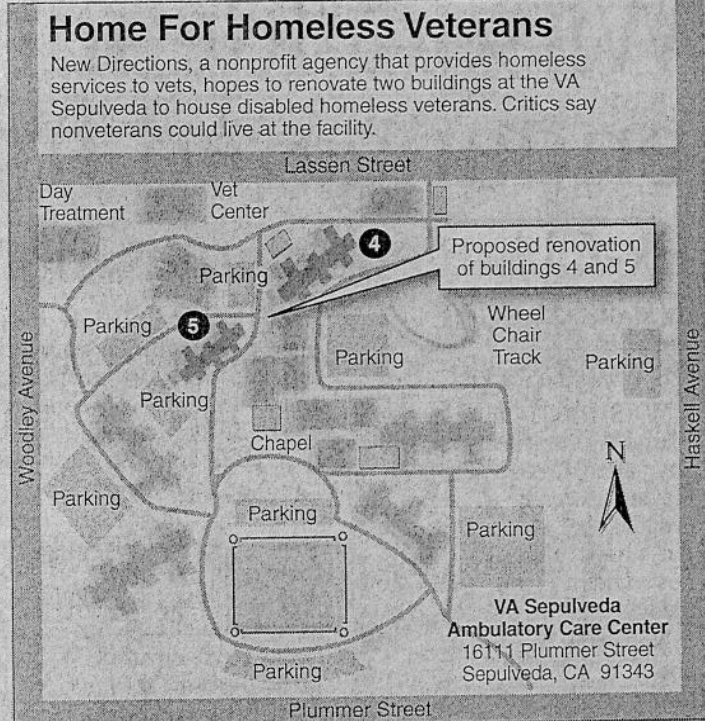
New Directions officials, who seek federal affordable housing funds, say vets will receive preference for their program. They added that the VA now bars alcohol from its facilities.

“It would be very doubtful that it would have nonveterans in it,” said Toni Reinis, executive director of New Directions in West Los Angeles.

“There are 20,000 homeless veterans in Los Angeles, which is a national disgrace. The vets coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan are absolutely raw with post-traumatic stress disorder. They have no place to go.”

The new facility, planned for 2009, would offer housing to disabled vets, including those with traumatic brain disorders and substance abusers who have been clean and sober at least nine months.

New Directions, widely



Source: Veterans Administration Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System Daily News

praised for its veterans services in West L.A., got off to a rocky start three years ago with plans to build a \$40 million facility at the VA Sepulveda, 16111 Plummer St.

When a poorly advertised public hearing drew just six local residents, Sherman demanded another hearing.

Residents and local officials, concerned the facility could draw more homelessness and crime, were then promised a veterans-only facility with high security and community input on the prospective lease.

“Prior to signing the lease, New Directions will meet and review the lease with the local elected representative (in) the area,” Reinis promises in a March 2005 letter to Sherman.

Last month, New Directions founder John Keaveney told a county veterans advisory commission that 25 percent of the residents at its VA Sepulveda housing project would be nonveterans. He said the VA would not sign the lease if it didn’t have a 25 percent nonvet component. Reinis said he was misinterpreted, and that she has requested that the minutes of that meeting be changed.

Some say Sherman’s vets-only bill could jeopardize funding for the only proposed center for homeless vets, which would take years to build if other agencies were asked to submit proposals.

“We have a lot of vets who will benefit from a place to live,” said Gene Smith, chief of staff for Rep. Howard Berman, D-Van Nuys. “We’re trying to take a measured approach to this. You have a group with an outstanding program; you have veterans who have an acute need.”

“We need a little more due diligence.”

Nonveteran use

Smith said battles to allow nonveteran use of VA facilities are taking place at other campuses, including the VA West Los Angeles.

“The congressman and I are really irate,” said Smith, who like Sherman supports a vets-only homeless facility. “If I am forced to, if I believe they are violating our zoning laws and allowing nonveterans, I shall ask the City Council to authorize a lawsuit against the federal government to stop it.”

Daniel Villegas, co-chairman of the North Hills West Neighborhood Council Land Use Committee, said he is suspicious about the lack of public disclosure. “I find it just appalling,” he said. “If this is such a good project, why not put it on the table for everybody to see?”

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Tina Burch/Staff Photographer

conversion because we weren’t into something,” Bill Lowe’s wife, couple’s move to Catholicism. A some married former Episcopal ministry after conversion.

with Cardinal Bernard Law of the Archdiocese of Boston, whose nomination he sought for the Pastoral Provision.

But three days before the meeting, the Boston Globe broke the clergy sex-abuse scandal. That slowed the process for Lowe, as did his family’s decision to return to California to care for Linda’s ailing parents.

Pursuit of priesthood

They moved to Camarillo and joined Junipero Serra Church, which is known as Padre Serra Parish. Lowe continued his pursuit of the priesthood, which included reading 50 books in

BRIEFLY

Bill would restrict VA residents

NORTH HILLS — Homeless housing proposed for the VA Sepulveda facility would be strictly limited to veterans under legislation introduced Thursday.

Rep. Brad Sherman, D-Sherman Oaks, introduced H.R. 1642, a bill that would restrict the proposed homeless facility to sober veterans supervised by adequate security and staffers.

New Directions, a nonprofit veterans service agency, has a pending contract with the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs to create 147 affordable apartments at the North Hills facility targeted toward disabled veterans.

New Directions officials say Sherman's bill could potentially sink the project by scuttling federal affordable-housing funds.

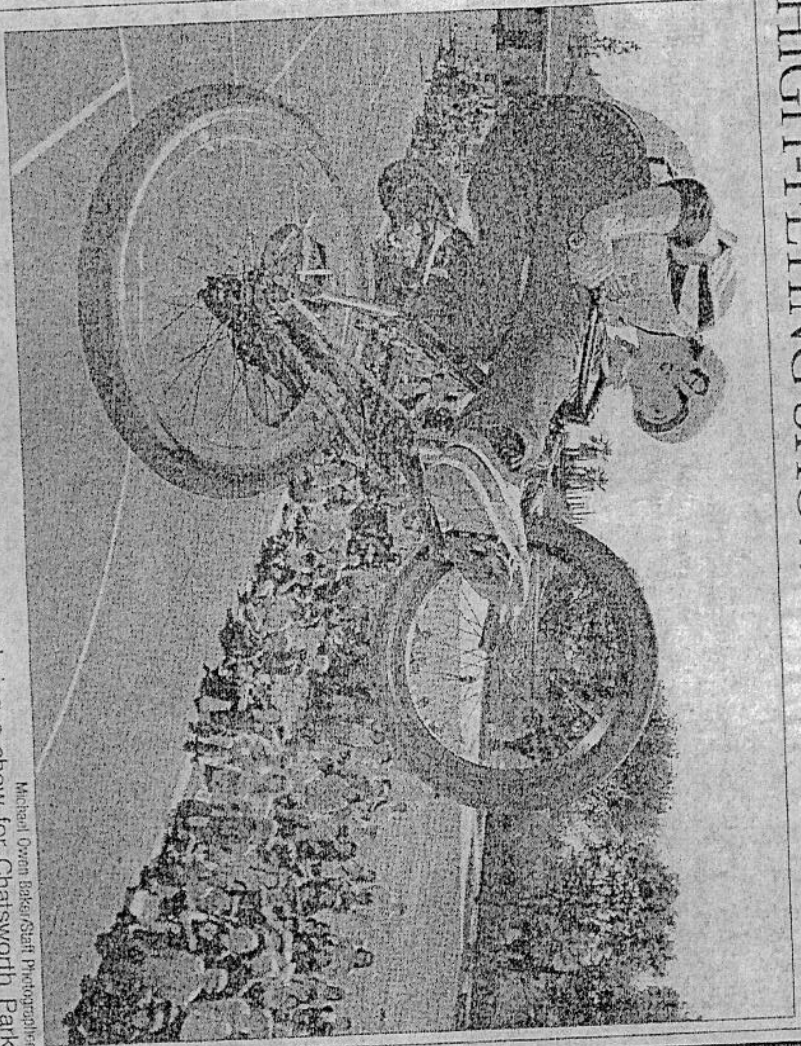
— Daily News

Women sought by LAFD Saturday

NORTHRIDGE — Women interested in becoming firefighters can learn more about the career Saturday, when the Los Angeles Fire Department holds a Women's Recruitment Expo at California State University, Northridge.

The event includes information, live demonstrations and hands-on simulations of firefighter techniques. Participants

HIGH-FLYING SHOW



BMX stunt rider James Foster launches off a ramp during a show for Chatsworth Park Elementary School students Thursday at the school.

Michael Owen Baker/Staff Photographer

Yorkie becomes toxic-food fatality

Daily News

SYLMAR — Pebbles, the Yorkshire terrier who grew ill after eating recalled dog food

48, of Sherman Oaks, said the dog was healthy before eating tainted dog food, which apparently triggered renal failure.

Menu Foods, the Canadian food manufacturer, said the dog had consumed food. "Clearly, these are dogs and cats that have specifically eaten that food," he said. "Clearly,

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