

## Bidding farewell to life inside the Lexington Hotel

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 07 September 2018 03:23

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Community Area Resource Enterprise, Inc., known as Care 66, announced Aug. 16, the seemingly imminent closure of the cash-strapped Lexington Hotel Sept. 30.

CARE 66, a nonprofit organization whose mission primarily focuses on creating opportunities to end homelessness, has operated the Lexington Hotel at 405 Route 66 in Gallup since 2009.

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In an Aug. 16 blog post, CARE 66 stated they ran out of funds and “will regroup and figure out how to address issues like poverty, affordable housing and jobs in the community.”

According to CARE 66’s blog, it costs \$500,000 to provide case management, connect people to jobs and benefits, and get them into homes. Their revenues, however, were less than \$80,000 per year.

“It’s not easy to move and find a house, especially if you have no money,” Sanjay Choudhrie, the executive director of CARE 66, said to a room of residents on Aug. 29. “[It’s] hard to find friends and community, which makes a house a home.”

Since taking the executive director role in Feb. 2005, Choudhrie reinforced the group’s mission of getting clients back on their feet, preparing them for achieving their goals, and showing them they are not condemned to the problems brought on by homelessness, drug abuse or mental illness.

### In the care of CARE 66

Some of the residents of the Lexington Hotel agreed to speak with the *Gallup Sun* and share how the closing of the hotel will impact them. Many will be left with no place to stay and few future prospects.

Air Force veteran John “JB” Harris said he has no idea what he is going to do if the hotel is forced to close.

“I never thought I’d have to move again,” he said in an Aug. 29 group interview. “I feel like I got tossed under the bus here.”

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Harris said he was being cared for by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, but it got to a point where he felt they dropped the ball and left him behind.

Ending up without a home, Harris arrived at the Lexington Hotel and has spent five years there. He said his time living at the Hotel has helped him on his path of recovering from drugs and alcohol.

Brian J. Hoskie, a Navy veteran, said the month-and-a-half timespan given to residents on Aug. 16 does not allow enough time for them find new places to stay.

"If they could give us some reassurance, I need to get resources together," he said. "Expenses are high. [They should] give us a year to figure things out."

One source, who wished to remain anonymous, said they will probably be out on the streets if the hotel closes.

Lexington Hotel resident Rebecca Gantar also had the thought of becoming homeless. Because of waiting lists, costs and limited income, Gantar said it's difficult to pay rent and find other living spaces.

"I was glad to get a place over here," she said. "Wherever I go, they want more money."

Gantar added that additional homeless people are housed at the Lexington Hotel in the winter months.

She said the efforts of the Hotel and CARE 66 have contributed to her 17 years of sobriety.

Another resident, who gave the name Herb, said the eviction would result in loss of sobriety and

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cleanup efforts.

“People will be going back to bad habits,” he said. “They need this place really bad. [It is] a sanctuary for them.”

One resident named Charles agreed it’s sad the building is closing, because people do need help.

“There ain’t a no safer place than here,” he said. “People are great.”

### **A home of their own**

The residents of the Lexington Hotel have spent the past several years forming a community of their own.

Hoskie said, like a family, the residents sometimes argue over small details. Gantar recounted how they spent one Thanksgiving feeding everyone at the hotel.

“All these people I’ve been getting along with, they’re good,” said a resident named Robert.

Roger Abeita, a Lexington Hotel resident for over one year, said he feels the hotel and its residents have been overlooked and disregarded by many people, including the City of Gallup and the Navajo Nation, both of which he feels could step in and help keep the building open, a sentiment shared by other residents.

“People here think we’re a bunch of alcoholics, and we’re not,” he said. “What kind of an opinion is that? We’re people.”

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When asked about the possibility of becoming involved with the Lexington Hotel, Gallup City Manager Maryann Ustick said the city is aware of the situation and trying to find options even if there is no immediate solution.

“It would take close to a year to put a funding package together,” she said in a Sept. 4 phone interview. “But lots of issues and challenges mean there is no quick solution. It can’t be done in a short period of time.”

Lexington Hotel residents and Choudhrie both mentioned a new potential buyer has entered the picture, with negotiations underway when the group interview was conducted. Apparently, a deal could be finalized by the end of September, but there were no other details given on the matter.

“Someone needs to light a fire under these people to get the deal to happen,” Harris said.

By Cody Begaye

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