

After Nine Years, Nonprofit Closing Its Doors

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Mary Donaldson/KMXT

For years, the Living Room in downtown has provided refuge and a hot meal for Kodiak's homeless residents and other services for those struggling to make ends meet. But after nine years, they are now forced to close their doors. Mary Donaldson has more.

It was a tough decision to make, but Living Room owners Dawn Offerman-Merila and her husband Donald Merila have decided that they must close the doors to their daytime homeless shelter. Located right in the heart of downtown Kodiak, the nonprofit provided food and shelter during daytime hours for Kodiak's homeless, as well as deterring people with substance abuse problems from relapsing by providing somewhere to go and something to do. Dawn says she and her husband moved to Oregon in October, and when they did, they had to decide whether or not to keep running the business.

(Dawn 1 :18s "without our presence there.")

She says they have purchased property in Oregon, and have opened a "center for regeneration, or a rehab facility. She says volunteers have been taking up the slack in the absence of her and her husband and has definitely affected the operations, and that overall donations during a time of economic hardships for many are causing the Living Room to close their doors. She says the amount of food donations have also gone down, making it harder to pay bills when they have to spend more of their limited budget purchasing food. She says about 50 percent of those they helped out were not homeless or transients, but rather those who need some extra support to get back on their feet financially.

(Dawn 2 :34s "close the doors of the Living Room.")

With their doors closing, there is cause for concern in

the community. Some believe that with no place for the homeless to go during the daytime, that they will begin hanging out on the streets, in the square or on the spit again, like they have in years past. The Living Room helped remove substance abusers and the homeless from hanging at "the square" downtown, says Allan Thielen, a supervising attorney with the Alaska Public Defenders Agency.

(Thielen :31s "done for so many.")

Lieutenant Ray Ellis with the Kodiak Police Department says that the Living Room closing is a resource loss for downtown Kodiak. The displaced will have to seek refuge elsewhere during the daytime, and fears that residents with past alcohol and addiction problems will fall back into old ways. He also says with the winter coming, he is not optimistic for those who will be displaced during the daytime, since the Brother Francis Shelter isn't open until the evening hours.

Lisa Booch, works for the A. Homes Johnson Memorial Library and predicts that they will see an increase in day time traffic with the Living Room closing its doors.

(Booch 1 :20s "will be busier.")

The public library is known to be a popular hangout for transients and the homeless.

The Living Room is now closed and will be officially dismantled when Donald arrives to Kodiak on August 15th.

"m Mary
Donaldson.

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