

## Wheeling Onward and Upward

**T**alk about a challenge. How about finding housing for a middle-aged homeless man in a wheelchair?

Well that's exactly what St. Elizabeth staff attained for John Ackerman early this June. The 58-year-old became paralyzed following a "spinal stroke" during surgery to repair a "triple a" aortic dissection, a tear in the lining of the aorta, the main artery that circulates blood from the heart throughout the body.

Until then he had worked for the park service, driven a truck and held several other jobs. Two years ago he went to work as usual, began having lower-back pain and shortly couldn't stand it any longer. He was taken to Christus St. Vincent, given a CT scan that diagnosed the problem – his aorta leaking blood into the kidneys causing the pain – and immediately flown to Colorado to a hospital that performed these specialized surgeries. He had three surgeries attempting to resolve the problem with the last one resulting in blood leaking into his spinal column causing paralysis.

"It was pretty depressing," he says now while calmly reflecting on the issue.

Following the surgery, John was discharged from the hospital in Colorado and sent to a nursing home in Rio Rancho where he stayed until his insurance coverage stopped and he ran out of money to self-pay after one year.

"I was about to be put out on the street and decided to call St. Elizabeth, where I had stayed



Nick Svetnicka and John Ackerman in the dining room at the Men's Emergency Shelter just before John moved into his new apartment.

sometime in my 20s, to see if they had a bed available," he says. "They did, the nursing home sent me over, and I was there for about a year."

Once John arrived he began working with Nick Svetnicka, St. Elizabeth's SOAR coordinator and case manager who focuses on longer-staying clients. Nick's initial steps were stabilizing John then helping him deal with the chronic

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St. Elizabeth is dedicated to assisting homeless individuals and families by providing emergency shelter, food, case management, counseling, supportive housing and referrals to partnering human-services agencies.

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St. Elizabeth Shelters & Supportive Housing  
 804 Alarid St. Santa Fe, NM 87505  
 505-982-6611 (office) | 505-982-5347 (fax)  
[www.steshelter.org](http://www.steshelter.org)

## Director's Corner



**Marty Ruybalid**

First off, let me say how honored I am to be here and how I continue to be amazed at all the great work being done. No matter how much you might think you know about St. Elizabeth, until you're actually working here you have no idea how much our staff accomplishes on a daily basis. Enrolling people in Medicaid and providing them with healthcare for

the first time in their lives, counseling folks to help alleviate their immediate or long-term trauma, moving someone into housing for the first time in many years. It's also been heartwarming to witness the work and dedication that comes from our volunteers and our community.

About myself, I was born and raised in Santa Fe, went away to college in California, met and married a woman from Oregon and then moved there. Along the way I got a degree in social work, first counseling individuals and then administering various housing programs, such as mental health and assisted living facilities, in the Pacific Northwest. Then a few years ago my mother's health took a turn for the worst, so I moved back to Santa Fe and was hired to operate the in-house programs at Santa Fe Recovery Center.

It's certainly a challenging time to take over a homeless-serving organization. Federal funding is being cut all over the board, the Big, Beautiful funding bill will reduce monies for Medicaid, SNAP (formerly food stamps) and other lower-income programs. And all this will trickle down to the state and local levels, potentially affecting our current state, city and county funding.

No matter the outcome, we will continue to advocate and support our clients, helping them to restore their lives, establish an income stream and move into housing. It's probably only going to get tougher to do so, but none of us got into this line of work because it was easy. St. E's is and will continue to be the safety net for the safety net.

I look forward to meeting as many of our supporters and friends as possible in the near future and am counting on you to continue your generous support so we can continue our work.

Executive Director



# Fire Away – the Suites Can Take It

Early in the morning of Friday, May 23, the start of the Memorial Day weekend, a fire erupted in the electrical room of Building 5 at Santa Fe Suites, St. Elizabeth's program for recently homeless and lower-income individuals. Set by an as-yet unidentified arsonist, smoke and fire awakened the residents, most of whom fled the building. But two residents were trapped in their apartments and had to be evacuated out of the windows by the Fire Department and then treated for smoke inhalation at Christus St. Vincent.

Santa Fe Suites staff members were awakened by texts around 6:30 and immediately rushed to the scene. Lara Yoder, St. Elizabeth's deputy director, called the Red Cross for assistance and alerted Henri Hammond-Paul, director of the city's Community Health & Safety Department, about the fire. The Suites counselor and case managers – Leesa Bloom, Luke Hanley and Tamlin Horne – were joined by Maria Vargas, St. Elizabeth's organization-wide therapist, to provide immediate trauma response.

"The residents were all in a state of shock," says Ericka Kidd, Suites program manager. "Several were in a fragile state already, having only been recently housed after being homeless for a long while and now were instantly homeless again. They didn't know what was going to happen to them, their few newfound possessions nor where they would be sleeping that night. Some have no income or savings and had no idea of how they would be able to feed or fend for themselves. It was a very stressful situation, to say the least."

Lara worked with staff at Apartment Management Consultants (AMC), the property

managers for the Suites, and the Community Health & Safety Department to find a place for the displaced residents to stay during that holiday weekend. The Quality Inn on Cerrillos Road had rooms available and the city forwarded funds to cover the costs. Red Cross staff arrived to register the residents for assistance and gave each a \$300 gift card to cover immediate costs. Throughout the day, Suites staff continued their counseling, provided two meals, escorted each resident back to their apartment to pack a few essential items, then transported them to the motel and

helped them get settled in.

Community Solutions, the New York-based housing non-profit that owns Santa Fe Suites, also stepped up to help. They, too, offered each resident a \$100 gift card, and Victor Cortese, their property asset manager, flew to Santa Fe to personally assess the situation and help facilitate the residents' transition into their new locations.

Once the weekend was over, the city reserved rooms for a longer term at the Days Inn, and the residents will stay there until the apartments are repaired. Suites staff visit every day to attend to their individual

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The electrical room in Building 5 where the fire began at Santa Fe Suites.



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pain in his stomach and neuropathy in his legs. He got him established with Southwest Care as his primary physician and referred him to a pain-management specialist at Nexus Health. At the same time John began meeting regularly with St. Elizabeth's in-house licensed behavioral health therapist for help coping with his life-altering circumstances.

"I recognized the struggle John was going through and his determination that this accident wasn't going to define him for the rest of his life," Nick says.

When John left for work that fateful day, all his possessions and documents were left behind

in his apartment and ended up being discarded while he was in the nursing home. So Nick had to obtain replacement copies of his birth certificate, Social Security card, medical cards and other identification papers needed for future housing.

"Nick was great," John says. "Besides getting all new IDs, he drove me to all my medical appointments, helped repair my credit, found a landlord with an ADA-retrofitted apartment near DeVargas Mall and secured a permanent supportive housing voucher that will pay all but a few hundred dollars of my rent each month. Since I already receive regular payments from Social

Security Disability Insurance, I'll be left with about \$1,000 a month to live on."

While staying at St. E's, John saved all his SSDI monthly payments and used them to purchase an electric wheelchair providing him with more mobility and independence.

"Coming to St. Elizabeth was a life saver," John says. "Without their help and guidance I would have become a ward of the state for the rest of my life, and I'm someone who doesn't like to depend on others. At least now I get to try one more shot and am going to do my best to stay as independent as possible for as long as possible."

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## A Grateful Client

Dear Staff and Leadership Team of St. Elizabeth Shelter:

Words cannot fully express the depth of my gratitude for the incredible support you have provided me during my time here. When I arrived at the shelter, I came with very little – barely more than the clothes on my back. Yet, today, as I moved into a new room, I was struck by a profound realization: I am immensely fortunate and deeply rich. This richness does not come from the possessions I now have, but from the overwhelming generosity of so many people who have donated the food, clothing and essentials that I now enjoy. I am endlessly thankful for the hospitality, nourishing meals, clothing, and, above all, the listening ear and understanding you have offered me. Your kindness has given me not just material support but also hope and a sense of belonging. To the entire staff and leadership team, I am profoundly grateful for your unwavering dedication and vocation to serve others. Your work is a blessing, and I bless each of you for the compassion and care you pour into this community.

With all my heart,  
Gerardo



St. Elizabeth staff shows their support for the annual NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) walk.

## Thank You to Our Dedicated Chefs!

Alan & the SSC	Rocky Packard
Kit Baum	Papa Murphy's
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church	Ron & Frances Porterfield
Bob Butler	Joanna Ruppel
Candlelight Neighborhood Association	Bud Ryan & Friends
Thomas Conboy	St. Bede's Episcopal Church
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## THANK YOU DONORS

Please visit our website,

[www.steshelter.org](http://www.steshelter.org)

to view the list of our generous donors from

November 1, 2025 – June 30, 2025

### Fire Away – the Suites Can Take It

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concerns, as well as continue to coordinate their ongoing care with service providers from other agencies. They also arranged for Kitchen Angels to bring each displaced resident seven meals a week to reduce food insecurity.

"Many of the residents have mobility as well as healthcare issues, and our team really came together to help them through this immediate crisis," Lara says. "Since most residents don't have their own transportation, I gathered up their shopping lists and went to buy what they needed. And that's just a sample of what we're all doing on a daily basis. I'm so proud of our partners – the city, AMC, Red Cross, Community Solutions and others – and it's taken all of us working together to minimize as best as we can the retraumatization the residents suffered after being made homeless again."

Ericka seconds this.

"Given the ongoing needs of our residents, every day is rigorous for my staff," she says. "But their level of compassion and concern while stepping up for these folks was truly beautiful to see. We are so fortunate to have such a great team at Santa Fe Suites."



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## Summer Wish List

### MEN'S EMERGENCY SHELTER

Please call (982-6611) or bring the smaller items to St. Elizabeth at 804 Alarid Street.

**Clothing:** Hats, rain ponchos, men's jackets, socks, underwear, shorts, t-shirts, backpacks.

**Personal Hygiene:** Shaving cream, disposable razors, toothbrushes, toothpaste, hotel-size shampoo, deodorant, sun screen, chapstick.

**Food:** Soda, milk, juice, eggs, sandwich bread, bottled water, coffee, bulk bacon/sausages/breakfast sandwiches, food donations from catering restaurants.

**Other:** Blankets, bus passes, kitchen utensils, household cleaning supplies, paper towels, toilet paper, gift cards, batteries.

**Volunteers:** Cooks for dinner, front desk attendants, landscaping help and painting projects.

### CASA FAMILIA

Please call (983-2042) or bring the smaller items to Casa Familia at 1604 Berry Ave.

**Clothing:** Women's new underwear, socks, long-sleeve shirts, shoes, rain gear, umbrellas, sun hats.

**Personal Hygiene:** Shampoo, conditioner, disposable razors, toothpaste, toothbrushes, hair brushes, foot powder, body soap, nail clippers, nail files, deodorant, sun screen, cough drops, cotton balls and Q-tips, Emergen Vitamin C\*, face wash and moisturizer, body wash, allergy meds Zyrtec and Claritan.

**Food:** Fresh fruits & vegetables, bottled water, coffee and creamer.

**Other:** Bus passes, movie passes, diapers (all sizes, particularly 4-6), baby wipes, twin size sheets, towels, latex-free gloves, kitchen utensils, pots & pans, dish soap, toilet paper, paper towels, shower shoes, AA/AAA/9-volt batteries, laundry detergent, painting supplies (roller covers, brushes tape), birdseed for feeders, sleeping bags and tents.

**Household Items:** Cleaning supplies, laundry detergent, dish soap, dish towels.

**Other:** AA/AAA batteries.

**Volunteers:** Cooks for dinner.

### CASA CERRILLOS

Please call (471-3456) to discuss their current needs before bringing them to the facility at 3811½ Cerrillos Road.

**Household Items:** Pots & pans, bedding, furniture, cleaning supplies, light bulbs.

### SANTA FE SUITES

Please bring to 3007 S. St. Francis Drive (behind Albertson's) but call first (505-494-4231) for furniture.

**Personal Hygiene:** Shampoo, conditioner, disposable razors, toothpaste, toothbrushes, hair brushes, body soap/wash, nail clippers & files, deodorant, sun screen, cough drops.

**Household Items:** Cleaning supplies, laundry detergent, pots/pans, crockpots, kitchen & cooking utensils, full and twin size sheets/blankets, towels, dish soap, dish towels, toilet paper, paper towels, vacuum cleaners, universal tv remotes.

**Other:** AA/AAA/9-volt batteries, bus passes, Albertsons gift cards, gas cards.

**Displaced Fire Victims:** Albertsons gift cards, Walmart gift cards, blankets, curtains, shower curtains, cleaning supplies, hygiene supplies, towels, dish towels, sponges, kitchen care packages, basic cooking supplies/packages, toilet paper, bedding for full or twin beds.