

# **We are problem solvers. We are the Salveo Communitas Organization**

**[www.salveocommunitas.org](http://www.salveocommunitas.org)**



We are a group of successful tiny home designers and builders who have come together to fight homelessness with our proud veterans.

Let us share a story of how we got started.

How this got started was Ben was out at his favorite coffee shop. As he went in he saw a man outside standing with an Army Veteran hat on. Ben walked over and pointed to his own USMC veteran cap and offered to buy the guy a cup of coffee. The vet said yes and they both sat down to two large coffees and two of the chocolate donuts that Ben cannot resist. They took a table in the front by the window and struck up a conversation. Mike the vet's name had been in the army and got out a few years before Ben had served.

While talking Ben discovered that Mike was homeless and had been homeless for quite some time. Mike opened up on his challenges and what led him to becoming homeless. Medical issues that wiped out his savings, no family, all contributed to not being able to make enough to afford his own place.

Mike talked about how he could get vouchers to help pay for an apartment, but most landlords do not like to rent to people paying with government vouchers, even when the renter is a vet. "There is a shortage of affordable housing in this city and it is squeezing everyone out of a place to live. I don't need or even want much. A small studio apartment with a place to cook, heating and AC and something better to sleep on than a cot. I like being outside, and I like to work with my hands and even though it is tough on my back I like to work with maintaining landscapes. So, you would think that a small studio would be easy to find. But that is just not the case. I am grateful for the bed I have now and thankful to the salvation army, but a man of my age, I graduated high school, served my country, got sick, but I am still able to work and love working. It is just tough to be in this situation." Mike and Ben talked for a while longer when Mike said, "Great to meet you Ben, but I need to get to my shift here. I got a job coming in and cleaning up after the bakers are done doing all the donuts, cakes and pastries. I come in so they can go home and get some rest, they come in at 2am to start baking six days a week. My job here is only a few hours a day, but it helps me pay for my medicine, and keeps some money in my pocket while I am waiting for spring when I can get more hours working landscape maintenance. There is just something about plants in spring that isn't there.

You know where I work now, so next time the coffee will be on me." Ben shakes with Mike and they say their goodbyes.

As Ben was walking over to the office he was packing up and closing down as he had just

sold his part of a construction business, he had an idea. He called an architect friend, Claire, who he knew had worked on small efficient green homes in the past and asked her what it would really take to create a small footprint house that anyone could afford. She said she knew the perfect person to ask. A friend of hers from school was a tiny house designer and builder with her husband. Claire called Brad and Sue. A couple calls later they all agreed to meet.

The four met up a week later with Ben. Ben had asked everyone to meet him, at an abandoned lot in the city. It was a sunny day and the four stood in a corner looking over a very large lot. Ben told them that this lot had been bought to be a new and used car lot. Eventually the funding fell through for the dealership and the owner had defaulted on the property. The city took it over. Ben had already called a friend at the city and they said they had federal funds they could use to help.

Claire asked "Help what?" Ben said "This is going to become a village of small footprint homes, tiny homes, each a small self contained studio apartment. Look at the bus stops right here where we are standing. We are on the edge of the business district with many small restaurants for the office crowds and people who work in city offices. Real job opportunities. That way just a few blocks is the zoo, and numerous parks. The city is ready to fast track permits, they can supply some initial funding, we can get some grants and the for this can make this happen. The mayor is on board as he knows this will make him look good for the upcoming election. In fact, we start here and I bet we can do this in other spots around the city and expand to other cities."

Brad said "Yes and we can build the homes and bring them in. This way we can build and not have to worry about the weather. We can build year round and when we deliver we know the home and its interior has never been exposed to the elements. No worry about mold. We can also save money on construction, in fact, We could employ some homeless veterans to do some of the light work and train them up. Again we'll have a safe, healthy controlled environment to work in. Painting, trim work, putting on hardware are all things we can teach anybody to do. Who knows some may want to learn electrical, plumbing or carpentry and my shop steward would love to help teach. "

Sue asked "What about utilities?" Ben said "Already asked and this lot has big main services already run to it. All of that was done early on before the deal fell apart. We won't bear any of that cost. All we have to do is get the water, gas and electricity run to the individual units."

Claire jumped in and said "I did some quick calculations, and looking at this lot, it is a standard double city lot. With this much space, if we kept to some minimal perimeter parking, and just used wide walking paths, recognizing minimal easements between the tiny homes. I am guessing that we can get at least 120 homes in and that will leave room for a community center, with some community staff offices, and even some social work offices. This could be a really beautiful place."

Sue started talking to Brad "We could use our Coventry tiny house, it is already using

universal design principles so it is wheelchair and handicap accessible. Hey what if we extended the porch to give more outdoor living space. Like you see in small towns, everybody had porches and they would sit out front to the neighbors.”

Brad spoke up “ yes the Coventry is perfect, super efficient, nice size bathroom, We’ll put on a steel roof so it will last forever. Too small for a king size bed. But that built-in sofa that is really a full size bed in disguise would be perfect, TV up on the wall, built in shelves, and I love the idea of expanding the Porch so that people could come over sit out under the porch, play dominoes and eat together. A great way to help build a sense of belonging and community. “

Ben said “I got a company I worked with on a large hotel project, it was my last project before I sold out, and they have the coolest ductless mini split HVAC systems. Super efficient, American made, and I bet they could make us a deal if we are talking about eventually 100 or more units. Heck thousands if we take this national. ”

Sue piped up “You know we could use solar powered lights on the outside so that the tenants would not have to pay anything to have the outside of their house lit up at night, and we should think about the same for the pathway lights. I saw some online the other day that looked like something you would see back in the early 1900s, very classy, subtly ornate and they also have security cameras built in and that would allow our security staff to be able to make sure all our tenants were always safe. Day and night.”

Ben said “Oh yes, good idea, we want someone here 24/7 to make sure everyone stays safe. This is not a bad neighborhood, but still we want everyone to feel safe. I wonder if we could talk the Post Office into letting us have individual post office boxes at each house? Or maybe, we have all the mail delivered to the community center. This way everyone has a reason to visit the center and see what activities the community has planned. The center will also have a large space to host community get-togethers.”

Clair spoke up, "You know I am on the local community board. But did you know that our local social services will provide counselors and other support programs if meeting spaces and basic support are provided? The community center would be perfect to house small meeting rooms and offices for social workers, job placement, health screenings, and even cooking classes."

Everyone fell quiet and you could tell everyone was excited. Ben broke the silence “This important work here. We can make a difference for a lot of people, and I believe this has some legs. We do this right, and I know we can take this to other cities. I am already committed. The city is in. What do you all think? “ Everyone agreed they were all in.

Ben said “OK, so what do we call this place? It needs to sound different. It needs to have meaning. Gravitas and all that.

Sue says “Well you brought up latin so let’s do something with latin. “ Everybody starts searching for latin on their phone. Soon the group comes up with Salveo Communitas

Claire says "Salveo "to be in good health" and Brad pops up with "Communitas it means Community - this would be a living well community."

Everybody agreed. Salveo Communitas.

Two weeks later Ben went back to meet back up with Mike. Ben showed Mike the layout that Clair had worked up for the community, and Brad and Sue's modified Coventry Bungalow. They went through the projected rent on the studio bungalows and Mike said that was well below anything around and well within his budget. Ben went on to point out and describe all the green space, community gardens and the healthy living gardens planned. Mike asked with a big smile "So, who do you have to be the landscape maintenance person? Have you hired anybody yet?" Ben smiled back and said with an even bigger smile "nope I have been waiting for you to say yes."

Mike responded, "I just have one last thing to ask before I say yes. Can I bring Molly along?" He nodded to where a medium-sized, light brown dog was attentively lying beside his feet. Ben said, "Companion animals will naturally be welcome. But this means you will have to help us design the dog park." Mike smiled and said, "I'm all in then."

Today we are just about to start the groundbreaking and our plans are to get commitments for the 120 Bungalows at this first site. This particular site is now being referred to as Salveo Communitas ONE as we have been approached with another property in the north part of the city the mayor would like us to consider as our next development. In the past few months we have put together all of the funding to make this community a reality, the only thing missing now is to get the commitments for the tenants who we now refer to as Villagers.

Salveo Communitas is affordable housing, not free housing. Our veterans do not need handouts; they need housing that is high value, offers community, and is sustainably priced. Affordable means it fits within their budget. Sustainable means the community, as a whole, generates enough rental income for the homes and common areas to be well maintained, keeping the entire community a beautiful and welcoming place for all our Villagers.