

Step Up goes Hollywood

By Nick Taborek

DOWNTOWN — Santa Monica-based homeless services provider Step Up on Second is expanding its presence outside of its home base with a plan to open a new housing facility for the chronically homeless in Hollywood.

The non-profit, which operates three housing projects in Santa Monica, has acquired the former Galaxy Hotel on Vine Street and is planning to begin renovation work this year with the goal of opening a 42-unit facility by 2012.

"We're taking this model of housing the chronically homeless [and] mentally ill that we've been so successful in in Santa Monica and we're replicating that model in Hollywood," said Tod Lipka, Step Up's CEO.

After years being known as primarily a Santa Monica and Westside service provider, Lipka said the recent acquisition is part of a concerted effort to focus more resources on the homeless population in Hollywood. "What is exciting for us is that there's so much need across the county for permanent supportive housing," he said. Step Up could acquire additional housing facilities in the Hollywood area, he said.

The \$12 million Hollywood project will be known as Step Up on Vine. It was made possible in part by a \$1 million donation from Aileen Getty and a \$250,000 contribution from Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky's discretionary fund, Lipka said.

Councilman Richard Bloom said the move into Hollywood is a natural one for Step Up, which specializes in assisting homeless people who struggle with mental illness. Bloom said both Santa Monica and Hollywood have homeless populations with a disproportionate number of mentally ill individuals.

"It represents more regional partners doing good things on homelessness," Bloom said of the expansion. "The nice thing about this is that folks in Hollywood are really trying to step up on homelessness in a big way."

Step Up receives about 60 percent of its funding from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. It also receives money from the city of Santa Monica, the federal government and through private donations. Step up follows the "housing first" model of addressing homelessness, putting people in housing who in some cases have lived on the streets for decades.

"Their model is one that can be applied in other communities, not just here in Santa Monica," Bloom said.



Mental health and housing provider Step Up on Second has plans to create more housing for chronically homeless individuals in Hollywood. *photo by Step Up on Second.*