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East Colfax Motel Hell

No room at the Inn.

By **Luke Turf**

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Looking through the window of room 105 at the Dunes Motel, Amy Limon could see the kids playing outside. She opened the door and slowly navigated her wheelchair down a wooden ramp that she'd had the motel maintenance guy install.



Mark Manger

When the Dunes shut down, Amy Limon moved up East Colfax to the Sands Motel.

The parking lot was littered with cigarette butts, empty beer cans and soda bottles, abandoned shopping carts and old mattresses. A doll lay on the ground, caked in soot and dirt. Two of the kids from room 226 were playing on a car; a boy from room 325 was shooting a half-deflated football through a basket that was really just a cardboard box tied to the second-floor balcony with a dirty pink ribbon. Usually the five kids who called 226 home were forbidden from playing in the dirty lot, just like the kids who lived in room 325. But the Dunes was closing for good on April 1, and both families were giving their children a little leeway now that most of the motel's addicts, dealers, gangsters, hookers, crazies and other shady characters had vacated the premises.



The cockroaches and bedbugs weren't checking out, though, and as residents left the motel, many abandoned clothing, sofas and beds, stuff the Korean conglomerate that sold the place had bought dirt-cheap from garbage pickers. The motel's new owners didn't care if their "guests" had lived at the Dunes two days or two years; anyone who wanted the furniture was welcome to take it with them. But no one did. "Go away or die," someone had written on one of the motel-room doors.



Mark Manger

Andy Klein arranged for Icon to help longtime Dunes tenants, like the Young family, cover the cost of new housing.

The Dunes was no place for kids; the families in 226 and 325 agreed on that. One man was banished from the property because he'd looked at young girls inappropriately. Another got his truck rammed by an estranged lover as kids played in the parking lot. Another brought a guy home from a gay bar and now faces charges for stabbing him to death in one of the motel's rooms.

No, neither family wanted to live here, but it was a step above the street, a step outside the shelter. And both families had hoped that when they left the Dunes for the last time, they'd also leave behind their transient lifestyle.

But now they knew that when the motel was emptied for the bulldozer, they'd be checking into other motels on East Colfax Avenue. Just like Amy Limon



Mark Manger

Amy Hess-Kibben and her family lived at the Dunes for two and a half years.



Mark Manger

Maggie Tidwell founded the Colfax Community Network eight years ago, to help families living in the motels.

Details:

To view a slideshow, [click here.](#)

and her wheelchair.

Amy Limon was born near Trinidad in 1941, the fourth child of an eventual eleven born to her Apache family. She was ten when her two older brothers were drafted to fight in Korea and her older sister married off at fifteen, bumping Amy up to the woman of the house, caretaker for her younger siblings and alcoholic parents. Amy was epileptic, but that didn't slow her down. In addition to taking care of the household, she started washing dishes at bars and restaurants after school and on the weekends.

She was still in high school when her drunk father made a move on her, showing her his penis. Her mother refused to believe her, but her sisters confirmed that he'd tried the same thing on them -- only they'd been too scared to speak up. Amy wasn't scared, though. She's not afraid of anyone, she says, so she reported her father to the authorities, and he bounced between a state mental facility in Pueblo and prison. While he was locked up, Amy married a man who was in the Air Force.

When her father was released, in 1959, Amy followed her husband to Denver, where he was stationed at Lowry. Afraid they'd be lost without her, Amy's mother and her seven younger siblings all piled into the car and moved to Denver, too.

Amy and her husband had four children -- one a daughter who lived only three months. By 1973, they had fallen out of love and divorced. Amy moved to an apartment with the children. She found work in a halfway house, taking care of people on their way out of mental institutions. She didn't love the work; taking care of people was all she'd ever done, and she was getting sick of it. But at work she found love: another Air Force man of Mexican-American descent who'd served four years in Vietnam and was one of the facility's residents.

Julian Limon had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and was bipolar, but he was always friendly with Amy. When he was released from the halfway house, he married her and moved into her apartment in Westminster, where they lived happily until Julian went off his meds one day in 1986 and was sent back to the institution. No longer able to afford the apartment on her own, Amy went to a women's shelter in Denver. A few weeks later she moved into Halcyon House, a subsidized apartment on Arapahoe Street, where she was still living alone when she had a stroke ten years ago. The stroke put Amy in a wheelchair. But by then her husband's condition had improved enough that his doctors allowed him a conditional leave so that he could live with her and take care of her. Her son helped, too, but five years ago he was killed in a gang shooting, an innocent bystander.

By last October, Amy's husband "started acting his bullshit again," and she knew he was off his meds. She woke one morning unable to find her wheelchair. She called for her husband but got no reply. He'd taken her chair cruising and left Amy stuck in bed. So she started sleeping in her chair. Then Julian had another episode, beating on the walls and making a mess of the place. Halcyon House managers told Amy that if she wanted to stay there, her husband could never come back. "But what if God makes my husband well again?" she asked.

The managers were adamant, though, so the couple headed for the Dunes, at 13000 East Colfax in Aurora, a cheap motel that charged \$535 a month. But on the night they checked in, the cops came to the door with a warrant for Julian, which got him a quick trip downtown before he was locked up again in a mental-health facility run by the University of Colorado right across from the Dunes. When he was later moved to another facility, Amy stayed at the motel.

But then in February, she heard that the Dunes would soon be shut down, bulldozed to make way for

residences and businesses catering to the people who will fill the 20,000 or 30,000 jobs that redevelopment is expected to bring to the area. Amy had to look for yet another place to live.

At the end of March, she checked into the Sands Motel, another rundown spot on East Colfax.

Aurora's motel business boomed during the 1940s and 1950s as families headed to the Rocky Mountains for summer vacations, driving west along Colfax Avenue -- Denver's stretch of U.S. Highway 40 -- and stopping for a final night's rest in Aurora. Several motels offered poolside views of the traffic.

"Aurora used to bill itself as the 'Gateway to the Rockies,'" says Tom Noel, a history professor at the University of Colorado at Denver. "Like Denver wasn't even there."

When Interstate 70 sliced through Colorado in 1964, it also sliced into Aurora's motel business. Although a few tourists with a sense of nostalgia would veer south off the new highway to stop at the Dunes, the Sands, the Ranger, the Family or any one of several dozen motels along East Colfax, most stayed at the chains that soon sprang up along I-70.

That left plenty of room for the transients who had begun spilling out of downtown Denver and creating a motel ghetto in the rapidly decaying buildings to the east, home to a community of criminals, immigrants, addicts and families that were both broke and broken. The motels began renting rooms by the hour, the week, the month, and eventually even accepted vouchers from homeless shelters. The rooms weren't cheap -- by this past winter, they'd command up to \$1,000 a month -- but at least residents didn't have to come up with hefty security deposits.

In 1995, the Army announced it would be closing Fitzsimons Army Medical Center off East Colfax. Fearing that its closure would be the final blow in the neighborhood's losing battle against crime and poverty, then-mayor Paul Tauer and the Aurora City Council tried to convince the feds to keep the hospital open. When that failed, they reached out to the University of Colorado, which was looking to expand from its campus at Ninth Avenue and Colorado Boulevard in Denver. Tauer convinced CU that Fitzsimons was the perfect location, and the university's medical, pharmaceutical, nursing and dental schools, as well as CU's medical-research facilities and the University of Colorado Hospital, all signed on to relocate to a part of the old Fitzsimons site that's now named the Anschutz Medical Campus. (Eventually, Children's Hospital and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs also agreed to build new facilities in what has been dubbed the Fitzsimons Life Science District.)

Thinking that the new Fitzsimons could be the economic engine to drive the town's revitalization, in 1999 Aurora rezoned a one-mile stretch of East Colfax, a process that pushed about sixty businesses into non-conforming status. Existing businesses that were now forbidden -- bars, gas stations, liquor stores, mobile-home parks and motels -- were grandfathered in, but Aurora officials encouraged the owners to redevelop their properties into more welcome projects such as housing, shopping centers, sit-down restaurants and hotels instead of motels.

Colfax didn't clean up quickly, though, and four years later the city took a more aggressive approach, adopting a tool known as "amortization," which would have eventually ousted non-conforming businesses that refused to sell to someone who would play by the new zoning rules. Obstinate owners wouldn't lose their land, but they would be forced to close up shop.

Amortization came way too close to seizure for many Aurora residents, and 7,706 of them signed a petition to have the plan reversed, or at least taken to a vote of the people. In April 2003, the city backed off on amortization.

But an urban-renewal plan for Fitzsimons and the area surrounding it was moving forward. One component was tax-based incentives for investors like Andy Klein, who broke out his checkbook when

he heard about the \$4 billion development surrounded by slums.

Klein, a graduate of Green Mountain High School who'd studied accounting and finance at CU, was just 25 years old in 1999 when he and a partner founded Icon Investment Group, a company with a simple mission: to buy and develop properties in areas ripe for gentrification.

In 2002, he made his first purchase on East Colfax: a mobile-home park across from Fitzsimons, where his high-school Spanish skills came in handy with the tenants. He didn't make a lot of money from the renters -- the park had a more than 100 percent turnover annually -- but Klein kept his eye on the big picture and kept buying properties. Icon soon picked up the Belair, the Family, the Weekly and the Sands motels, a mobile-home sales lot, two mobile-home parks, a satellite shop/junkyard and a defunct bar once known as the 4-U Lounge. Icon also arranged to swap one of its properties off of Sixth Avenue with the Retired Enlisted Association, which was ready to leave its headquarters on East Colfax. Icon bought three single-family homes. And the Dunes.

About \$30 million later, Icon owned fifteen properties on East Colfax, everything from Ursula to Xanadu streets, all ready for redevelopment.

One day this past February, Klein got a call from Maggie Tidwell, executive director of the Colfax Community Network, which she'd founded the same year as he'd founded Icon. He hadn't heard of the nonprofit before, but remembers thinking that it was "really cool" that Tidwell's organization existed solely to assist and advocate for the families of East Colfax, "especially the children."

Eight years ago, Tidwell was working at Project Pave on anti-violence training for kids and domestic-violence prevention when she met some children playing in the parking lots of the East Colfax motels. Not only did the kids she saw need a safe place to play, but most of them were hungry, too. So Tidwell set up an after-school program for the motel kids and created CCN to reach out to people in need and connect them to resources. But those resources haven't been easy to find.

"It was interesting to me when Maggie Tidwell called and asked if we'd like to help," Klein recalls. "And we said yes, and she said she'd never heard of anyone willing to help before. I was shocked by that comment. The apathy galled me. Helping out is the right thing to do. When you're dealing with someone's home, it's very emotional. Maybe it's because I've got a heart, but I can't see being a contributor to homelessness in the area."

So when Klein decided that the time had come to close the Dunes, Icon offered to pay a housing security deposit for anyone who'd been living at the motel for six months. And anyone who'd been there for over a year was eligible for a deposit and first month's rent, up to \$1,000 total.

Charles Young cruised his big, bad blue-and-white pickup down the dusty roads of Monticello, a rural farm town in Florida. He was looking for a laborer to help in the nursery where he was working, so he headed for the campfire where immigrants often went to drink beer and make new *amigos*. But when Charles asked the buzzed guys if they wanted work, they all said no. One muttered something in Spanish and whistled for a younger, wide-eyed cousin, Mary.

Although Mary was always looking for work, her cousins were more interested in setting her up with a *gringo*. Mary took the job -- mostly to get to know Charles, she admits. Soon he was spending way too much money on his gas-guzzler of a truck, running Mary the thirty miles to and from work every day. Mary didn't speak English. Charles didn't speak Spanish. But they fell in love, and *poco a poco* -- little by little -- they learned each other's language.

In 1996, 18-year-old Mary and 25-year-old Charles, a Texas native, moved to Denver. They stayed with Mary's brother for a while, then got their own place. Charles was doing landscaping work; Mary was about to give birth. Although Charles was catching a lot of shit from Mary's family, who said she was more in love with the idea of a green card than she was with Charles, he took his pregnant girlfriend to

the Denver City and County Building and made her his wife.

In 2000, Mary and Charles and their two children -- son David and new daughter Linda -- moved back to Florida, this time taking a crack at Tallahassee, where Charles found work installing credit-card readers on gas-station pumps. But two years later, he returned home one day to find Mary packing. "We're moving back to Colorado," she told him.

Earlier that day, Mary had called her brother in Colorado and discovered that their sister was moving to Denver from Mexico. If Mary's sister was going to be in Colorado, Mary wanted to be there, too. So she, Charles, David, Linda and baby Mikey drove back to Denver, where they stayed with Mary's brother and his family for a couple of years. At one point, a neighbor must have called the authorities, because inspectors came to the house, Mary says, and made sure that the eight adults and nine children were living in safe and sanitary conditions.

Mary and Charles's fourth child, Javier, arrived about the time Mary's brother got divorced. The Young family needed somewhere else to live but had trouble finding anything affordable.

With nowhere else to turn, they wound up at the Samaritan House shelter.

"Colorado's a tough place," Charles explains. "If you ain't got no education, if you ain't got no degree, you can't find a job good enough to pay the rent."

With five mouths to feed, Charles bounced around the different East Colfax day-labor centers, plotting his course by which jobs were available on which days of the week. He never held a sign at a stoplight, never asked anyone for change.

Charles was kicked out of the shelter after he missed a mandatory financial planning class, but his family was allowed to stay for a short while. Armed with a motel voucher from the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, in August 2004 Charles moved into a room at the Royal Host, a shady motel at 930 East Colfax. His family joined him a few days later. It was the first time that Charles had ever exposed his children to an environment infested with drugs and prostitution, and he tried to keep their contact with the outside world to a minimum.

One of his first evenings at the Royal Host, Charles saw a drug dealer doing his thing on the steps. He asked him to leave. When the dealer didn't comply, Charles told him to leave. The discussion got physical, he remembers, but the dealer left, and Charles got a reputation for taking weapons right out of crackheads' hands.

When word of the vigilante tenant got back to the motel manager, he was impressed enough to ask Charles to be the Royal Host's maintenance man. Charles took the job and moved his wife and kids up to the employee-only floor, where they had two rooms -- one for him and Mary, one for the kids. Mary started cleaning other rooms for credit toward their rooms. Although it was a rough place to raise a family, the couple was on their way to a deposit on a more respectable home last summer when the Royal Host's owners suddenly shut down the motel so they could implement some big remodeling plans.

Charles was out of a job, the family was out of a home, and Mary had just had a fifth kid. With no other option, they moved into room 226 at the Dunes.

The Youngs thought they would only be there a month. But eight months later, as the Dunes was being evacuated, they were still there. Charles thought he had a job lined up as a maintenance man in a triplex, where the family could live in a unit with a big back yard as part of his pay. He'd even moved a lot of the family's things over there, but then both the job and the unit fell through.

With the Dunes set to close the next day, Charles moved his family to the King's Inn, another motel on

East Colfax in Aurora.

"It's only temporary," he told Mary and the kids.

Over the next eighteen months, as motels, trailer parks and apartments shut down to make way for new developments along East Colfax, as many as 1,500 units could be emptied onto the streets.

Aurora isn't prepared for that.

In her eight years working on East Colfax, Maggie Tidwell says she hasn't been able to place a single person in Comitis Crisis Center, Aurora's only homeless shelter, which has just ten beds for adults and families, twelve for runaway youths and ten units of transitional housing.

The city is putting \$1 million into the rehabilitation of a 22,000-square-foot building at Fitzsimons for Comitis, which will double capacity to 48 beds -- but shelter administrators say they want to stay focused on Comitis's self-help mission rather than simply increase the number of people they can shelter. The new facility is scheduled to open in June.

Tidwell thinks Aurora badly needs a larger shelter for its homeless as well as more transitional housing, but she knows the city is unlikely to provide it. "What the City of Aurora is afraid of," she says, "is that if you build it, they will come. But they're already here. We gave out 800 cold-weather vouchers in Aurora last year -- \$12,000 worth. There are homeless people staying here, and it's the City of Aurora's responsibility to deal with them. There are plenty of poor people in Aurora, and when the motels come down, homelessness is not going to go away."

Those 800 vouchers used at East Colfax motels this past winter were administered by Housing Justice, a faith-based nonprofit created to address unmet housing and shelter needs across the state. Mary Hupp, executive director of Housing Justice, teamed with Tidwell's organization and other Aurora nonprofits last year in anticipation of a cold winter, and tried to come up with a plan to help needy families in Aurora. They thought a temporary shelter might do the trick, and found enough money and volunteers, even donated church space. But last June, when they approached the Aurora City Council with a request to relax certain building codes so that the facility could be created, the council -- citing a lack of sprinklers, restrooms and kitchens -- refused their request.

"We have certain people on city staff who have really tried to support and assist us," Hupp says. "I'd hate to paint everyone with one big brush. Having said that, here's what I think that illustrates: In Denver, there's been a relaxing of certain codes to cater to this situation; there's been the political will to say this is something we need to do. In Aurora, I think that same political will did not exist, and because of that, the city attorney frankly did not want to put the city in some kind of potential for liability by agreeing to waive building codes. What we would like to see is an increase in the political commitment to address this issue."

Both Tidwell and Hupp applaud Denver's Road Home, that city's ten-year plan to end homelessness.

"But that's Denver," Tidwell says. "This is Aurora. We don't have a Road Home. There's no road home."

While the city to the west gets national props for tackling homelessness, Aurora mayor Ed Tauer, son of former mayor Paul Tauer, has trouble even estimating the size of Aurora's homeless population. (It's at least 788, according to a 2006 survey that Tidwell says came up short by about half.) But not everyone would consider a family living week-to-week in an East Colfax motel homeless, Tauer says.

As proof of his city's commitment to helping the homeless, Tauer points to Home of Our Own, a city-run program that helps families move from motels into more stable housing. According to city statistics, 52 families found housing through that program in 2006. The city has also given \$400,000

to the Aurora Housing Corporation to help create twenty units for low-income housing and ten units of transitional housing. Aurora receives \$108,000 in federal housing funds from HUD each year as well, and splits that money between Comitis, a battered women's center and Arapahoe House, a non-profit substance-abuse treatment provider with a transitional program that served about 65 homeless individuals last year.

But that's not nearly enough to house the people who are about to lose their rooms in East Colfax motels.

"Our number-one concern is that a number of the people in these hotels are families. We know statistically that when homeless people have to move, they have to change schools, and 25 percent of these children will lose one full grade level a year because of school moves," says Roxanne White, manager of Denver's Department of Human Services. "Our number-two concern is that people who are living in the motels are members of the community, and they shouldn't have to move out of their community to find new housing. And our number-three concern is that communities take care of their own homeless and not send them to places like Denver and use precious resources that are allocated community by community to help the homeless.

"I personally think that when a community is unwilling to take care of the homeless, it's a sign of how it takes care of all its citizens."

Eight-year-old Jaime lived in room 325 at the Dunes with her brother and sister, her mother and her mother's boyfriend. She hated the place.

She'd often lie awake at night, staring at the cockroaches crawling on the ceiling above her, afraid to close her eyes and fall asleep because a cockroach might fall on her face. Jaime had spent almost half of her life in East Colfax motels, and she'd seen a lot during that time.

"Mom, the other day I saw this lady walking down Colfax," she told her mother one day in March, lifting her shirt up past her belly button and swaying her hips side to side, "and a car came by and picked her up, and she got in."

Jaime's older brother, Jerry -- aka "Three," since he's the third Jerry on his father's side -- extended his disdain for motel life beyond the Dunes to include much of East Colfax. "In Aurora, everybody's like gangster, like, 'Yo, what up, I want to kill you,'" nine-year-old Three said.

His mother, Amy Hess-Kibben, grew up in Boulder and earned a degree from Florida State University in 1996. The next year, she gave birth to Three; Jaime came along a year later. The family soon moved to Colorado, where the children's father opened a tattoo shop in Colorado Springs. Amy started snorting lines with him on the weekends. One of those weekends, when the dealer was out of coke, Amy's man brought home some meth instead. Amy snorted it and found that she liked it much better than coke, because she felt well enough the next day to go to her job at a maternity clothing store. Plus, with meth she didn't have to keep snorting lines to stay high, as cokeheads do.

In late 2001, the family lost the tattoo shop and had a really shitty Christmas with nothing under the tree but mounting bills. Amy, still a once-a-week tweaker, took her kids to her mother's place in Westminster, where they stayed in the basement for two weeks. Then they moved in with a friend for a couple of months, then went back to Amy's mom's place. Finally, Amy rented an apartment in Thornton.

In April 2002, she was working in a publishing-house bindery and paying the bills, thanks to filing an income-tax return for the first time in three years and getting \$11,000 back from the government. That's when Amy's man brought her a bag of meth. That November, she got a job as a store manager in the Tabor Center. The next month, she started smoking meth in the apartment. What had been a

once-a-week habit became a daily thing.

Amy's father died in early 2003. She got the news on a Saturday and was still high and awake on Tuesday, on her first major binge.

"At the beginning it was like coffee; I used it just to wake up," Amy explained. "When I got to be such an addict that I was getting high every day, it got to the point that I had to use or I'd be sleeping and I wouldn't be able to take care of my kids. I'd eat it, twice a day."

She stopped paying the bills, and in July, they were evicted. Amy took the children to her mother's place and spent the first night in a U-Haul. Then she started couch-surfing, staying high and trying to figure out what to do next.

Armed with a motel voucher from the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, Amy checked in to the Aristocrat on West Colfax for about five days in September 2003. There was no phone, no alarm clock, no sheets, no towels, no soap, no shampoo, no television -- just three twin beds and a bathroom.

When the voucher ran out, Amy ended up with the Interfaith Hospitality Network, bouncing between different churches that allowed a homeless person to stay for a week at a time. Just before Halloween, she went back to her friend's in Thornton, then to her mom's, then to another friend's in Aurora before getting a nine-day voucher for an East Colfax motel, the Sands. After that, she wound up in a relative's trailer. But then another income-tax return came in, and Amy took her kids back to the Sands.

It was spring break and the first time his mother had tried quitting meth, Three remembers. But then his father, who'd dropped by to visit the kids at the various places they'd stayed, came to visit with a pocket full of the drug. When the money ran out again, Amy and the kids went to Access Housing, a shelter in Commerce City, where she got a two-bedroom apartment that they could stay in for a month. The family lasted there six weeks, with Amy taking a day off meth now and then so that she could pass the mandatory urine tests. The shelter's administrators thought she was looking for a job, but most of the time she was just tweaking.

In November 2004, Amy and her family wound up at the Dunes. They moved into room 116, then switched to 228, which was bigger. When Amy couldn't pay for it, the family was booted out -- but then Amy got another voucher and went back, this time to room 227. Getting kicked out of the Dunes became a weekly thing, and so did moving back in after Amy had raised the rent from friends or at churches.

Amy had always done a lot of babysitting, too, usually for friends who were going out to find meth, friends who paid her in meth. But after Amy quit the drug -- getting clean just with the help of a friend who was doing the same thing -- she started charging for her services and expanded her clientele.

One day the Dunes' maintenance man found Amy at the Ranger, the motel where she and the kids were staying after they'd been kicked out of the Dunes once again. He was leaving in a couple of months, moving out of state, he told her, but in the meantime, she and her kids could stay in the living room of his room at the Dunes -- 325, which featured one of the motel's best air conditioners. Maybe that would help her get back on her feet.

But Amy wound up swept off hers when the maintenance man's son, Joshua Kinney, came home. Together they watched the Cartoon Network, laughed and talked. Joshua was ten years younger than Amy; he'd moved from California to Colorado with his parents back in 1995, when he was thirteen. The family had spent more than a year at the King's Inn on East Colfax, then stayed in a nearby townhouse and at a trailer park. Joshua had been bouncing around East Colfax motels ever since; he could remember nineteen moves.

In September 2005, when Joshua and his father were set to move again, Amy threw a little party. She

and Joshua hooked up that night, and after he left, she got drunk and smoked meth -- even though she'd been off it a few months, even though Joshua despised the shit. Still, she held on to room 325 because she knew that Joshua would come back.

The next month, he did. Then Amy got pregnant.

They were still living in the Dunes with Amy's kids and the baby when they got word that the motel would be closing for good on April 1, 2007.

A couple of weeks after the Dunes closed, another motel on East Colfax, the Blue Spruce, gave its tenants the boot -- after collecting that week's rent, some say. Yet another motel, the Melody, was also closing. Aurora officials called in Maggie Tidwell for an emergency meeting.

"The meeting was basically a discussion of what the city could do to assist with the current motel closure," Tidwell says. "What I kept trying to get around to was the overall plan for people who would be displaced immediately and over the next few years, but we kept focusing on the Blue Spruce closing and where these folks are going to go. They said that they didn't know about the Blue Spruce and the Melody closing, and I said that we've had seven years to plan.

"The purpose of the meeting, truthfully, was damage control, and we know that -- everybody knows that. We're going to have people doubling up. We're going to have people sleeping outside who weren't sleeping outside before. It's going to exacerbate a problem, whereas if we looked at transitional housing programs and a large shelter that could help people reintegrate back into Aurora's society, then we'd be taking care of the problem instead of trying to make people invisible."

Instead, the problem is going to get worse. "This is the first wave," Tidwell continues. "This is when everybody's paying attention. We've got a lot more families to go."

At least Klein has committed to offering the same compensation package to residents of all of Icon's properties. Tidwell says she really appreciated Klein's asking for CCN's input on how to help the families, and is grateful for the plan that Icon came up with. "He doesn't have to do it; he's not required by law," she says. "Nobody's advocating for children to grow up in rundown motels, but I do believe if you're coming up with fancy new buildings, you've got to come up with a new place for these people to live. It's a moral issue, and we're talking with businessmen and politicians, so we need to make way for morals in the discussion. By getting rid of the motels, I feel they are trying to get rid of the people."

And while most of the motels are definitely coming down to make way for redevelopment projects, the city's done next to nothing to help the people those developments will displace. "If the city's involved, we have adopted the federal guidelines for relocation," says Mayor Tauer. "It's easy to miss the point that we have people who are in need, and we need to have programs in place for people who are in need. In some ways, this is helping to illustrate and put resources in place for an existing issue. We don't have unlimited resources, nor does anyone else. It's a different set of rules when we're in the project and when we're not."

While Tauer expects that Aurora will be involved in some of the projects that result from future motel closures, the city is not part of the current round of closures. For Aurora to get involved now, he says, would be like intervening between two private parties conducting a business deal. But the city can encourage developers to do well by the residents living in the properties that it buys to demolish and develop, he adds, and the families can look to Adams and Arapahoe counties for aid.

"As you know, in Colorado, most social services programs are provided at the county level -- that's where residents get access to Section 8 housing vouchers, affordable child care and assistance with food," Tauer writes in a follow-up letter. "Unfortunately, there is not a wide spectrum of services in Adams or Arapahoe counties specifically designed to address homelessness in Aurora."

And the homeless in need of services often get lost in the bureaucratic shuffle between Arapahoe, which lies south of Colfax, and Adams, to the north. Even Tauer isn't sure which county offers what services for the homeless.

No officials from Adams or Arapahoe counties, or even Aurora, stopped by the Dunes to see if the Youngs needed help relocating. Charles found the King's Inn on his own.

Amy Limon says an Arapahoe County caseworker tried to coerce her into moving into a retirement home with "some doped-out seniors." But otherwise, the only help she got was from her son and the woman working the front desk at the Dunes, who told her about other spots on East Colfax. Amy Limon wound up at the Sands Motel, now also owned by Icon and slated to close later this year.

At the very end of March, Amy Hess-Kibben and her family were still in room 325 at the Dunes. It smelled like piss, and Amy lifted the baby to sniff her bottom. But the reek wasn't coming from the diaper; it was emanating from the cardboard box that she was picking through, a box that hadn't been opened since one of the last times she'd been booted. Most of the stuff inside was trash, like the flower-shaped item she'd made by bending metal wire while tweaking one night. "Everyone needs a crazy-glue holder," Amy joked. But the search did unearth a few treasures, like an old CCN flyer with a picture of Jaime that showed the type of kids the organization was trying to help.

The family in room 325 was one of sixteen eligible for the assistance that Icon had offered. Eleven took advantage of it. Four used their credit at a trailer park owned by Icon; two went to other Icon motels. Amy and Joshua wanted to use the Icon money as a down payment on a decent place, to buy them some stability. Not only did room 325 smell like piss, but it reeked of Raid. Amy had been trying to rid the kitchen of roaches for months. Now she mostly wanted a clean kitchen where she could cook again.

But they hadn't been able to find a place before the deadline, so Amy and Joshua moved their family to the Sands for a while.

That's where Amy Limon and her wheelchair were already living, in room 305. "What are they going to do with all of these people in the motels?" Limon asked. "I swear, I don't know what I'm going to do. That case manager, she wants to put me in those independent apartments. But those are mentally ill people where they have them all dosed up on the pills, like a nursing home. I don't deserve that."

Twice a week, Limon got out of her ramshackle room to go to a doctor's appointment or run some other errand. An assistant came by three times daily to change her diaper and give her a bath, because her wheelchair was too big to get into the motel room's bathroom. Limon asked the maintenance guy at the Sands to build her a wooden ramp like the one she'd left at the Dunes so that she could roll outside and watch the children play.

Down the street at the King's Inn, Charles and Mary no longer allowed their kids to play outside. After the drug-infested Blue Spruce shut down, a lot of its former residents wound up at the King's, and drug trafficking in the parking lot went way up.

But Charles wasn't lying when he'd told his family that their stay here was only temporary. Using the money from Icon as a deposit, he soon found a two-bedroom apartment not far from Colfax where he can smoke cigarettes on his balcony and watch his kids play.

"It's peaceful," Charles said. "Just like when we were living in Florida and had our own place. I don't have to worry about someone beating on the door at midnight wanting a cigarette; I don't have to worry about my kids playing with kids who smoke cigarettes and smoke weed at that age. It's a nice place. Now we just got to hold on to it, make it work."

After eight days at the Sands, Joshua also secured a suitable place for his family, an apartment in south

Aurora. Thanks in part to Icon and CCN, the 25-year-old signed the first lease of his life. "I'm grateful for any help at all," he said. "I'm used to doing it all myself."

Icon didn't rent the room they vacated at the Sands. Empty motels are easier to evacuate.

With Amy and Joshua and their kids gone, life has gotten lonelier for Amy Limon. "I'm 65 and I'm still trying," she says. "I know there's hope for me still. I don't want to just wait to die and wait for somebody to come visit me, some nurse to come check my blood pressure every two hours or something like that, so I can't go outside without asking permission."

"When they close this place, they'll help me find somewhere else," she says hopefully. "They're not that cold. They won't throw someone out in the street."