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They can't go home again

Demolition around Aurora campus forcing many to move

By Carlos Illescas
Denver Post Staff Writer

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Aurora - The cockroaches are still there. So are the bedbugs. And the skunks.

But for Anthony Volpe and Linda Lundstrom, space R-1 at the Fitzsimons Village mobile park is home.

But just until the end of the month.

The couple, who have lived at the trailer park for about four years, are among dozens of people who have until Sept. 30 to move from the trailers and shady motels to make way for bulldozers that will usher in a new era for East Colfax Avenue in Aurora.

A mile stretch of Colfax on the south side from Interstate 225 to Peoria Street is being razed to make way for shops, restaurants and hotels to cater to the new Fitzsimons Life Sciences District.

Nearly all of the other buildings are gone: the bowling alley, satellite dish store, the local watering hole, even a mobile home sales office.

Volpe and Lundstrom knew this day was coming. Many of the hundreds of families who lived in the area already have left. The remainder received official notice recently that it finally was time for them to go too.

The two have secured a new "fixer-upper" trailer and a place to park it, thanks to \$4,000 given to them by the park's owner, Icon Investment Group. Icon didn't have to buy them out, but says it is helping many residents secure new housing.

"I have mixed feelings. I'm happy to go, but sad because of the memories," Volpe said. "Part of me will miss this place."

Three motels - the Sands, the Family and Weekly - are closing, all owned by Icon.

Icon has been working with a coalition that includes the Colfax Community Network and the city of Aurora to assist residents.

Icon owner Andy Klein, who hopes to break ground next year and finish his portion of the project by early 2009, said it was important to help the residents, even if they weren't living in ideal situations.

For those who have lived at Fitzsimons Village for a year or more, Icon is paying their first month's rent and security deposit, up to

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\$1,000, Klein said. Shorter term residents also are getting help relocating, he said.

"I don't feel good about displacing them, even though we are helping them get into a better living situation," Klein said. "While it might not be a great home for some, this is what they do call home."

Daniel and Amber Sigle and three of their kids sat outside their trailer and watched as heavy equipment dragged vacant trailers to a trash pile to be hauled away.

The couple has rented the trailer at Fitzsimons Village for almost a year, but said they were not given any offers of help and were never told of the park's imminent demise until a few months ago. They have found a new trailer and will live in Arvada.

"It's been a big pain," Daniel Sigle said.

Added his wife, Amber: "This was just a place to stay for a while so we can save up and get something better."

The Aurora City Council in 1999 declared the area blighted, banning new mobile home parks and thereby alerting the residents their time was limited. But many came anyway, and the area has been home to drug users, prostitutes and other criminal activity.

But with the opening of the medical campus, most felt it was a time for a change.

When completed in about eight years, the nearly \$400 million project will include two hotels (one with a conference center), 500 residential units, 500,000 square feet of office space and 100,000 square feet of retail.

Pauline Harness has lived at the Sands motel on East Colfax since April. The two-bedroom motel room is home to her adult daughter, her son and grandson as well. But now it's time to move on, she said.

"A lot of people are unhappy," Harness said. "I'm getting a new apartment nearby on Peoria, so we'll see."

Staff writer Carlos Illescas can be reached at 303-954-1175 or cillescas@denverpost.com.

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