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�5:15 am 12:45 pm \*7:45 am

# Big smiles at Our Place as more than 300 take in Good Friday meal

**CINDY E. HARNETT Times Colonist** 

A Good Friday meal of baked ham and scalloped potatoes and Rogers' chocolate cream-filled hearts delivered by the Easter bunny was enjoyed by fewer people this year amid the pandemic, but the smiles on the faces of those who came were just as big.

"It's always good to see those happy faces coming in for this special meal," said Grant McKenzie, of Our Place Society. "That's the heartwarming part. It's a little bit sad we're not having the big celebration ... but we're trying our best to let people feel a part of a community."

Up to 350 attended the Easter weekend meal at Our Place in Victoria on Friday. That's down from about 800 to 1,000 people in pre-pandemic times when politicians, police and media personalities would serve up the hot meals.

COVID-19 safety protocols were in place, people ate six feet apart and there were plastic barriers, even though most staff and attendees have been vaccinated, said McKenzie.

About another 400 meals were delivered to three hotel locations where temporary housing has been provided for people without homes or displaced by the pandemic. "We're all feeling kind of



Easter basket full of Rogers' chocolates greets people arriving for the Good Friday meal at Our Place.

disassociated because we can't really have our family together and stuff, but this is something that the homeless community faces every day of every year and so having these special days, I think, is important to try and say, you know, we're all family," said McKenzie.

Reflecting on the Easter and spring theme of renewal, McKenzie said he is grateful the province has stepped up with proposals for more housing. We are so happy the province is buying places to move people into, especially because by buying them it tells us they are



Baked ham and scalloped potatoes are served at Our Place. Another 400 meals were delivered to temporary housing. VIA GRANT MACKENZIE



A happy attendee enjoys the dinner on Friday.

planning on those sites becoming permanent housing."

The B.C. government is fast-tracking four supportive housing projects in Victoria for people without homes, to begin construction as early as this summer. David Eby, attorney general and minister responsible for housing, has said the projects will deliver up to 192 permanent homes with aroundthe-clock supports. That's in addition to the ongoing work to open temporary shelters by April 30 for about 18 to 24 months to house 200 people currently living in city parks.

There's a lot of resistance when moving people without homes into these types of sites, said McKenzie, but once they are stabilized and assessed, they can be moved into permanent housing.

Our goal has always been that we see our housing as transitional, as a way to move people into permanent housing."

Addressing the increase in violent incidents and weapon seizures related to some of the temporary housing sites in Victoria, McKenzie said people are in "pure survival mode" when they are camping in parks. Once these people can be given stable housing it cuts down on the fear and exploitation they experience "and when they feel more secure it cuts down on the crime dramatically."

A noticeable change happens within as little as three to four weeks of a displaced person being housed. "You can actually see a transformation when people are getting healthy meals and when they have a good sleep in a room [that is safel."

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# Tourists in Tofino, but 'far less busy than normal'

local' and actively supporting

approach for small and remote communities that will see everyone in Tofino offered COVID vaccinations on April 12, said Law. He hopes that will provide community and help toward a speedy recovery from the pan-

the Association for Canadian Studies and the University of veyed feel safe attending family gatherings at this point, and a quarter believe the government is overhyping the dangers Toronto mother Marcia Martins said she is scaling back her family's usually large Easter holds this year, noting the move feels safe since most attendees don't work outside the home. "These are just difficult times -With Cindy E. Harnett, Times Colonist

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