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VERDE VALLEY CORONAVIRUS HEROES: Pines Motel offers free lodging to first responders during COVID-19 pandemic



Anna May Cory, owner of the Pines Motel, sits with her son and assistant motel manager Cory Bruening, and his wife Martha, motel manager. Pines Motel has made rooms available at no charge to first responders during the COVID-19 pandemic. VVN/Bill Helm



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COTTONWOOD — In a world consumed by the stress of COVID-19, Rachel Torbitzky found peace one night at the Pines Motel in Cottonwood.

An acute care physical therapist who works primarily in Flagstaff, Torbitzky said that physical therapists, alongside occupational therapists, speech therapists and nurses work with patients “to minimize effects of prolonged immobilization.” COVID positive patients, she said, “are no exception.”

“Even though I have a lot to be grateful for, I have found being surrounded by so many unknowns, evolving protocols, and constant news of COVID-19 to be quite stressful,” Torbitzky said. “Adding several added days of commuting was exhausting.”

Fortunately, Torbitzky could rely on the Pines Motel in Cottonwood for help.

The Pines Motel in Cottonwood is typically about 90% full in March and April, according to the hotel’s owner Anna May Cory. But with the COVID-19 pandemic, bookings are down to about 17%. With plenty of room – and a big heart – Cory has opened her motel to first responders in need of a place to sleep. For free. Because Cory’s father grew up during the depression.

“He taught me to value everything,” she said. “Out of that value, I earned everything, we earned everything we have. Giving and sharing is helping someone who might not have what you have.”

According to Cory’s son, Cory Bruening, the Pines Motel considers itself a “resource of the community.”

That resource was exactly what Torbitzky needed. At first, she “reached out to some friends to ask to stay in their spare bedroom.”

But then Torbitzky “soon realized that this posed an ethical dilemma.”

“Even if I minimize interaction and on the surface appeared healthy, could I be potentially exposing my friend (a healthcare provider herself) who might then pass on COVID-19 to her high risk patients?” she wondered.

That’s when she learned of the Pines Motel.

“I am so very grateful for the Pines Motel’s offer so that I could make a meal, take a shower, go for a walk, and get some rest,” she said. “I could take care of myself without worrying whether I was making the right choice.”

Not only are rooms sanitized to support COVID-19 safety protocols, they’re also fully stocked with supplies “so we wouldn’t do housekeeping while they’re here,” Bruening said. “After they leave, we sanitize, we do a deep clean.”

Some people might call Anna May Cory a hero for spotting a need and filling it. But not her.

“When you’re a hero, you don’t think you are,” she said. “We were sitting here with 27 rooms and they weren’t being used. It’s our value system to help. I try to live my values.”

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