

Calgary rental company offers free apartments for Slave Lake fire victims

BY CLARA HO, CALGARY HERALD MAY 24, 2011

Presented By:



Bob Dhillon, president and CEO of Mainstreet Equity, says his company has 50 apartment units available in Edmonton to house Slave Lake evacuees for up to three months free of charge.

Photograph by: Ted Rhodes, Calgary Herald

CALGARY — A Calgary-based apartment rental company is offering 50 Edmonton suites to Slave Lake fire victims free of charge for up to three months.

"When I was watching TV, I saw many guys sleeping in gyms, sleeping bags, in cars, and my heart bled for them," said Bob Dhillon, CEO of Mainstreet Equity Corp., which owns 8,000 apartment units across Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon and Vancouver.

"What we can offer is accommodation. We want to give them an opportunity to get their life together."

Dhillon said volunteers spent the weekend cleaning and readying the 50 units, which can house up to 200 residents. Appliances and utilities will be covered by the company, he added.

"This is my plea to the Alberta business community," he said. "I think it's very important to help out at times like this."

Boardwalk Rental Communities, which owns about 12,000 apartment units, has reserved 150 units in Edmonton and Grande Prairie and is offering evacuees a discount of \$150 off per month, said David McIlveen, the company's director of community development.

McIlveen said the province will subsidize the rent for up to three months, but Boardwalk will continue to offer the discount for up to a year if necessary.

Alberta Housing Minister Jonathan Denis praised companies and members of the public for lending a hand to the Slave Lake evacuees.

Slave Lake residents who require housing should register with the Red Cross, which can help with short-term needs, Denis said.

Those who require medium- to long-term housing can apply through the department's Emergency Accommodation Program.

The province has dedicated \$50 million toward emergency needs, and \$15 million of that will go to housing displaced Slave Lake residents who are uninsured or underinsured and whose houses have been damaged or destroyed.

The program can cover up to 100 per cent of their housing costs until Aug. 31, at which point the province will reassess their situation and channel them into existing programs if they continue to require assistance, Denis said.

The province has received about 300 housing applications, he said, adding some residents have been placed in vacant student residences at the University of Alberta and Grant MacEwan University campuses in Edmonton.

So far the Red Cross has received over \$950,000 in donations for the Slave Lake fire victims, said spokeswoman Leila Daoud.

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