

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cedar River Haven Marks First Anniversary

*Celebrates being Iowa's first certified women's rural recovery community
First group of women successfully complete the program*

Letts, Iowa – One year ago, Cedar River Haven, located in Letts, Iowa, opened its doors to a young woman in crisis from substance use disorder. She was delivered in her orange jump suit from jail. Today, that young woman celebrates more than a year of sobriety as she prepares to transition into a valued staff member. She and four other women also successfully completed the program – the program's first. These women played an integral role in the Haven's journey since its opening.

Cedar River Haven announced also that it has become Iowa's only certified rural recovery community, setting a pioneering path for women in recovery seeking transformative change. Cedar River Haven stands as a symbol of hope and renewal for women hailing from all corners of the state. Within its welcoming walls, residents engage in a profound 12-step immersion program, guided by a supportive, peer-led social model.

Founder Freda Sojka's visionary dream from more than three decades ago led to the eventual establishment of Cedar River Haven.

"More than thirty years ago, I envisioned a sanctuary where women could find solace and embark on the journey to a better life. At Cedar River Haven, we take the approach of extending a hand up, leading with an open heart, and offering the women a haven of peace as they work toward their hope-filled futures," said Sojka.

Her vision became a reality in 2022, thanks largely to the sale of her company, Simply Soothing, Inc, the parent company of Iowa's own success story, Bug Soother. Today, Sojka and her team oversee the recovery of 10 to 12 women on average, with the potential to accommodate up to 24 individuals.

"The capacity is limited primarily by funding and staffing constraints," said Denise Ball, Cedar River Haven program director. Our waiting list of women underscores the profound need for such a refuge in Iowa."

Despite those limitations, Cedar River Haven will be transitioning out five women over the next month, having successfully completed the recommended year-long program.

Avarie Smith was the first woman to join the program more than a year ago. Today she is a staff member at the Haven.

“I applied for the recovery program because I needed a sense of purpose, a safe place where I could focus on recovery,” said Smith. “Nothing else I tried seemed to work for me.”

“Seventy percent of the original women are successfully completing this program,” said Ball. “That success rate is a blessing within a disease such as Substance Abuse Disorder (SUD) and above national and state standards.”

Cedar River Haven goes beyond the traditional recovery model, fostering entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency for its residents. “The Haven” has been the driving force behind the opening of several businesses in the Southeast Iowa area, including Cedar River Ranch Resort and Events Center, Cedar River Catering, The Box Lunch food truck, and the soon-to-be-opened Bake & Brew on 92, a café with a cause. These enterprises are instrumental in the success of Cedar River Haven's women, providing not only employment and training, but also the tools to forge fresh beginnings, enhance their resumes, and prepare them for new lives beyond the program.

"Our program combines a comprehensive 12-step immersion, giving the women access to meetings, connections with community resources, life skills development, and employment opportunities – all aimed at equipping our residents for success in society," explained Ball.

Securing certification from the National Association of Recovery Residences (NARR) underscores Cedar River Haven's unwavering commitment to maintaining the highest standards of care. This certification offers assurance to the community, potential residents, and their families that they are engaging with a top-tier program. The structure of Cedar River Haven falls between halfway house and treatment center models. It has more structure and more resources than a halfway house but does not offer in-house clinical or medical support.

Women entering Cedar River Haven come from diverse backgrounds, including prison, jail, treatment centers, home, or the streets. The pressing need for long-term programs like Cedar River Haven is undeniable in Iowa, where access to recovery support remains a critical issue, especially women.

In the United States, the recovery residence landscape primarily emphasizes aiding men, with a ratio of at least 2:1 in favor of men over women. In addition, 80 percent of recovery assistance is found in urban areas, leaving rural communities to struggle on their own.

"Iowa's recovery landscape has long been in need of a transformation, especially when it comes to women." asserted Sojka. "We proudly stand as the first certified rural recovery residence in Iowa, extending a lifeline to those often overlooked in rural communities."

When asked what the woman who came to Cedar River Haven, over a year ago in the bright orange jumpsuit, would think of herself today, Smith proclaimed, “She would not recognize me at all.”

For more information about Cedar River Haven, please visit <https://www.cedarriverranch.com/cedarriverhaven>. To schedule a tour or engage with a staff member, contact us at 319-726-2360 or via email at info@cedarriverhaven.org

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CAPTION:

Avarie Smith has doors open to her now after successfully completing Cedar River Haven's recovery program.

(Left to right) Denise Ball, program director, Avarie Smith, resident and Freda Sojka, co-founder.

About Cedar River Haven

Cedar River Haven, located at 2798 Casey Ave, Letts, Iowa, opened its doors in August 2022 as a transformative recovery community dedicated to supporting women with substance use disorder. Cedar River Haven is founded by Freda and Jim Sojka, the former owners of the renowned global company Simply Soothing, Inc., makers of the popular, natural bug repellent, Bug Soother. Cedar River Haven offers a holistic approach to recovery through comprehensive programming, employment opportunities, training, providing an idyllic setting for women in recovery's self-care, empowerment, and healing. Residents are employed by Cedar River Ranch, where they are trained in various roles, including resort property cleaning, the execution of on-site events, as well as cooking and baking for the catering company, the Box Lunch food truck, and the soon-to-be launched café, Bake & Brew on 92, a café with a