

Home in deadly explosion could host human trafficking victims

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Posted: Aug 21, 2014 5:07 PM CDT Updated: Aug 21, 2014 7:37 PM CDT

LEBANON, TN (WSMV) -

Just six months after an explosion at a Lebanon home killed an elderly couple, a local minister is looking to change the story of tragedy to one of triumph.



Rondy Smith, founding director of Rest Stop Ministries, hopes the home will be a respite for up to 18 women trying to escape the dangerous world of human trafficking.

"We want to have a sanctuary, an oasis, a healing space for these women," Smith said. "They deserve to be in a home."

Rest Stop Ministries is working to bring women out of sex trafficking and into a normal life. She sees the property as ideal.

"The space communicates a message to them that they are worthy, that they are people," Smith said.

The 25-acre property has a troubled story of its own. It is the former home of John and Marion Setzer, who were murdered by their son-in-law in an explosion last February.

Smith hopes to write a new chapter to their story.

"The family would love to see something redemptive and something restorative come from this tragedy," she said. "When they began to learn our vision, they said, 'It's perfect. It's actually who our mother was.'"

Earlier this week, the TBI announced a campaign against sex trafficking called It Has To Stop.

The staff at End Slavery Tennessee agrees. The group works with victims as young as 4, but said long term residential placement for adults is the biggest challenge in Middle Tennessee.

"We've kind of made do with domestic violence shelters or extended stay facilities, but they're far from ideal," said Derri Smith, executive director of End Slavery Tennessee. "Right now, I could send probably five women to her to be in her program."

While some in the surrounding community have been reticent, supporters are working to gain trust.

"These are not women who are going out deciding they should do this," Derri Smith said. "These are women who have been exploited, usually since early childhood."

"What they need for their healing is they need a residential community to come around them," Rondy Smith said.

Rest Stop Ministries has received a letter from the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse

indicating they may soon be getting their license. They hope that plans can move forward in the next month.

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