

Tubbs fire survivor sparks housing revolution

Vikki Miller March 21st 2025



Homes 4 the Homeless founder Steve Schneider being interviewed inside the VESSEL V9 gen 6 smart home.
Robert Grant

In a gripping interview, Steve Schneider recounts the harrowing night of the Tubbs Fire that devastated his home and community. In the early morning hours of Oct. 7, 2017, he reflects on how that fateful night would alter the course of his life and shape his destiny forever.

Schneider awoke to silence in his Santa Rosa home—the power was out, and darkness enveloped him. Stepping outside, he was struck by an unimaginable sight: the nearby fire station was engulfed in flames. Panic surged within him as he realized, "We were the last ones left. Everyone else had evacuated."

With the Tubbs Fire raging and 90 mph winds hurling embers, he and his wife hastily attempted to escape. Smoke filled their garage, and he struggled with the emergency release on the door. He bent the metal tab, trapping them inside, while their bulldog, Seymour, gasped for air. As the inferno closed in, Schneider

climbed onto their car to pull the emergency release straight down. Finally, the door opened, but they had to drive through a wall of flames to escape. A few minutes later, their home was gone.

In the aftermath, Schneider and his wife were left with nothing but the clothes on their backs and the heartbreaking loss of Seymour, who succumbed to pneumonia from smoke inhalation. They lived in a hotel for 18 months, witnessing countless others without homes. "I saw families—people with jobs, kids, lives—sleeping in cars or on sidewalks. I knew I had to do something," he said.

Determined to make a difference, Schneider searched for the best housing solutions worldwide. He traveled extensively and noted that in countries like China, homelessness was nearly nonexistent. "Why do we accept this as normal in the U.S.? There has to be a better way," he thought.

In 2018, Schneider founded Homes 4 The Homeless, transforming personal tragedy into a mission for affordable housing. Starting with repurposed shipping containers, he soon expanded to fully code-compliant modular housing. His first major success was in Newark, New Jersey, where his team built a functioning housing community in just 90 days, providing shelter for numerous families during a brutal winter. "With determination and teamwork, we can move faster than bureaucracy," he told me.

Today, Homes 4 The Homeless operates without direct government funding, relying on private partnerships, volunteers, and corporate sponsors. The organization has 16 volunteer case managers and 65 dedicated volunteers, including attorneys, celebrities, and community leaders.

One of their latest innovations is Space Capsule Housing—advanced modular homes that are move-in ready upon arrival. Unlike traditional shelters, these units offer immediate, dignified housing with built-in solutions for safety and rapid deployment. Schneider states, "We don't just build shelter. We build homes—places where people can heal and feel human again."

With rising demand for quality, deployable housing, Schneider launched NESSEL, a branch of Homes 4 The Homeless dedicated to affordable housing for struggling families and disaster victims globally. NESSEL, meaning "miracle of God," represents an organization that transforms devastation into hope.

Schneider also oversees the Global Humanitarian Division of NESSEL, aiming to provide emergency housing in natural disasters, refugee crises, and war-torn areas. His team is working on two large-scale projects more than 100 units each to support underserved communities. "The housing crisis isn't just about the homeless; it's about families and people on the brink of losing everything. We are here for all of them."

Homes 4 The Homeless demonstrates that innovative housing can be deployed quickly, affordably, and with dignity. However, "We can't do it alone." Schneider invites nonprofits, government agencies, community leaders, and donors to join the collective effort. "We've seen the worst of disasters, but we've also witnessed the best of people when communities unite. This isn't just a housing solution—it's a movement." And we are all in this together.

To learn more, visit: www.homes4thehomeless.org and www.nesselhousing.org