

[00:00:00.410] - Speaker 1

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[00:00:23.010] - Speaker 2

Thanks for being here on this Labor Day. The show you normally hear right now will be back. I'm Andrew Colton. The fires on the island of Maui have brought new attention to the housing crisis on the island, it's a crisis when there isn't a natural disaster. Now it's even worse. With a true lack of temporary housing available to those who lost everything. One man is trying to change that. Joe James is founder and CEO of Mobile Emergency Housing. It's a company that sends housing to disaster zones with workers to put the housing together. He's with us now. Joe, thanks for being here. How do you get this modular housing onto the island?

[00:01:00.940] - Speaker 3

Well, we have a variety of equipment throughout the United States for Maui, basically, we have formed a strategic partnership with a couple of companies that could deliver modular style housing to Maui. Basically, we have a variety of products that's going to be shipped over there to bedroom units and also storage units that are collapsible and easy to transport. So that eliminates a lot of the problems with typical mobile homes making it over to Maui.

[00:01:31.850] - Speaker 2

And when you're getting it over to a place like Maui, and I realize you don't just focus on the Hawaiian Islands, of course, but for purposes of the current major disaster situation. Are they coming over by boat? Are you able to get these on a plane? How does that work?

[00:01:46.850] - Speaker 3

No, they're definitely going to be going over by boat. Basically, we're going to be contracting an entire ship to ship the product over according to how many requests we have.

[00:01:58.140] - Speaker 2

And how long does it take to put these things together? What's the process once they arrive, where they're going?

[00:02:03.830] - Speaker 3

Well, depending on the configuration, it could take anywhere between four and six weeks, not including transit time.

[00:02:13.530] - Speaker 2

So the lifespan of one of these units, you set it up, it's good to go, people move in. What's reality in terms of this temporary housing, are we talking weeks, months? Could somebody stay in one of these for a year? How sturdy are they?

[00:02:29.310] - Speaker 3

They are very sturdy, actually. They have a warranty lifespan of 50 years, so they can be lived in long term. A lot of our deployments are anywhere from six months to two years. So they're definitely built for long term habitation and they have all of the creature features of your home washer dryers. The units that we're sending to Maui have smart toilets, smart mirrors, AC.

[00:02:59.470] - Speaker 4

They give you everything that you need.

[00:03:00.910] - Speaker 3

In order to live there long term.

[00:03:03.150] - Speaker 2

How does the cost work out here? Are these subsidized by government agencies, by some sort of disaster management program or do you deal directly with the folks who are in need?

[00:03:16.180] - Speaker 3

Well, we deal directly with the folks in need, and we go through their insurance company. Their insurance companies normally have a closing their policy, so the homeowner would contact us, and we would then provide them with documentation that the insurance company would approve. And the insurance company picks up the tabs so there's no out of pocket expenses for the homeowner, typically.

[00:03:39.010] - Speaker 2

Joe James is founder and CEO of Mobile Emergency Housing. He's joining us. Right. You know, when you hear a disaster like the one in Hawaii, when you hear fires in other parts of the country or hurricanes or tornadoes, are you just the sort of person who's like, look, I want to help, or how did you end up doing what it is that you do?

[00:04:00.780] - Speaker 3

How I got into this was back in 2017, I should say. A friend of mine approached the residents of Puerto Rico after they were decimated by Hurricane Maria, and that started the ball rolling to form this company. Previously, I was in another company. I owned another company that provided luxury on site accommodations for the film and television industry, and we did the Grammys and things of that nature. So that kind of segued into this business.

[00:04:30.490] - Speaker 2

And I know and I fully appreciate that there are people out there who are like, well, you shouldn't be profiting off of other people's misfortune. That being said, is this a self sufficient business? I mean, I certainly think businesses should be allowed to survive and even thrive if they're in the business of helping other people. Is this a decent business model? Do you see the ability to grow something that's helping people who are in need of help?

[00:04:55.230] - Speaker 3

Absolutely. I take great pride in helping people during one of the worst times in their life. I mean, these individuals have lost everything they own, and a lot of times they're left to fend for themselves. The insurance companies put them up in a local motel. Sometimes it's more than an hour away from their home. They have kids who need to go to school, and they have faced with having to put their kids in a different school district. And it just creates a lot of people for the family. So what we do is we bring mobile housing to their location, to their property. If they have enough room on their property, we will set up a two to four bedroom mobile home, plug it into their existing utilities, and they can reside on their property while they're rebuilding so that kids don't have to change school districts and they stay in very familiar environments.

[00:05:48.670] - Speaker 2

Do you ever have a problem working with local authorities? I mean, do local municipalities ever say, listen, we don't know your company. We're not letting you in here. We have problems with the land. We have problems. I mean, I would imagine after a fire situation like what we're talking about in Maui, that there are limited places where you can set up because there's still power issues, there's still a lot of debris. How do you circumnavigate some of the, what I might call government relations or local relations to be able to get your housing units in where they are so needed to the people who truly need them?

[00:06:23.770] - Speaker 4

Yes, we handle all the permits necessary to locate a mobile home on the homeowner's property. Typically, we have not had that problem. Most of the municipalities want to help their residents get settled, so it's not that much of a difficult process, especially if they were already going to hire an architect and they have a building permit. They can just simply add the temporary housing onto their building permit for a specific period of time, normally anywhere from.

[00:06:57.640] - Speaker 2

Six months to a so and we can start to wrap up with this. Joe, I'm impressed by some of the numbers

that I've seen. Your goal, and correct me if I'm wrong here, is to deliver 500 of these units to the island of Maui every month for the foreseeable future. Is that right?

[00:07:14.330] - Speaker 4

We estimate somewhere between 355 hundred units according to the production schedules of our strategic partners. And that's what our goal is right now. So what we're doing is we're reaching out to the local insurance companies, adjusters.

[00:07:32.600] - Speaker 3

And making sure that they're aware of.

[00:07:34.950] - Speaker 4

Our service and referred them over to our website, which is mobileemergencyhousing.com.

[00:07:40.580] - Speaker 2

So Leslie, here what happens when the emergency is over, do you guys come back in, I guess take these things apart, box them up, take them to your headquarters, I would imagine in New York, and then dispatch them again when they're needed in the future? Or are these one use sorts of things and that's that and then they just get destroyed when you're done?

[00:08:01.450] - Speaker 4

No, actually these are not one use items.

[00:08:04.960] - Speaker 3

Basically, we would come pick them up.

[00:08:07.360] - Speaker 4

And bring them to one of our various storage facilities throughout the United States.

[00:08:11.840] - Speaker 2

Joe, thanks. That's Joe James. He's the founder and CEO of Mobile Emergency Housing. iHeartRadio continues to raise funds for those in need, working with the Red Cross to help those who lost so much. Visit this radio station's website for more about the Kokua from Maui program. Or visit the Red Cross website at redcross.org. You can donate with credit cards, with Apple, Pay, even PayPal.