



Lauren Hammock talks with her father, John Hammock, in one of the model "tiny homes" at Tulsa Custom Buildings. Photos by STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World

# TINY HOMES BIG DRAW

Prospective buyers seeking small spaces

BY HANNAH COVINGTON ♦ WORLD STAFF WRITER

The entire house may only be as big as her parents' master bedroom, but Lauren Hammock has big plans for her tiny home.

"It's just me and my cat, and we don't take up a lot of space," said Hammock, 32. "The appeal is that I could live anywhere with this, even off the grid."

Hammock is a Tulsa native who now lives in Austin, Texas. During a recent visit home to see her parents, she decided to look at tiny homes with her dad.

They pulled into Tulsa Custom Buildings at noon on Thursday and stepped up to three tiny home models open for perusal.

The store's electronic billboard flashed overhead: "TINY HOME: TINY MORTGAGE."

The billboard keyed into a chief benefit for prospective buyers like Hammock.

"I'm sick of living in an apartment but can't afford a big house and all the maintenance and upkeep that comes with that," said Hammock, who makes jewelry for a living. "This is a lot more affordable, so why rent when you can own your own space?"

Advertised as Tulsa's first tiny-home dealer, Tulsa Custom Buildings sells various floor plans that cost between \$49,000 and \$67,000. The business, run by Autumn Morrison and her father, Bill Stokely, started selling tiny homes at the end of April.

More than 300 people came through on the first weekend, and about 60 stop by every day to peek inside the tiny homes, Morrison said. "It's blown my mind how crazy the response has been," Morrison said.

HGTV's "Tiny House Hunters" even came about six weeks ago to film the business for a show that should broadcast sometime in August.

Tulsa's booming interest in tiny homes falls into a larger trend of extreme downsizing.

With documentaries, Pinterest boards and television shows, scrupulously designed small spaces are gaining serious attention.

In February, tiny home residents even formed an organization to help with building guidelines and zoning questions.

Based in Florida, the American Tiny House Association keeps track of building regulations in each state and works with local governments to help make neighborhoods more tiny-home friendly, said Elaine Walker, the group's

SEE TINY D4



A bathroom, top, and bedroom are pictured in one of the model "tiny homes" at Tulsa Custom Buildings. All of Tulsa Custom Buildings' floor plans are 400 square feet, not including the loft or front porch, which bump the square footage to 580. And for those who decide to design or build a tiny house themselves, the size can be even smaller than that.

## Tulsa Custom Buildings

To see floor plans or find out more information about Tulsa Custom Buildings' tiny homes, call 918-791-3101, or visit [tulsacustombuildings.com](http://tulsacustombuildings.com).

## American Tiny House Association

For a more detailed look at zoning laws in each state for tiny houses, go to [americantinyhouseassociation.org](http://americantinyhouseassociation.org).



Teenager Sarah Gerlach, a former member of the Jenks Trojans Pride band, juggled cancer treatments and high school to graduate last May with her class. In remission now, the 18-year-old is headed to Tulsa Community College to major in music education. MICHAEL WYKE/Tulsa World

## Tulsa teen shares story of her battle with cancer

▪ Sarah Gerlach is in remission one year after the diagnosis.

BY RITA SHERROW  
World Scene Writer

Finding out you have cancer isn't like it's often shown in the movies.

There's no big, dramatic moment when the doctor comes in and says "You have cancer." At least not in Sarah Gerlach's case.

The Tulsa teenager found

out in August 2014 that she had a golf-ball sized mass in her brain.

"I either missed something or I didn't understand, but the moment I actually found out it was cancer was when my mom and I were sitting in the hospital room on the third floor of Saint Francis Hospital — an oncology floor — and I asked what oncology meant. I knew I had a tumorous mass, but didn't know it was cancer," she said in a recent interview.

Her diagnosis came at the start of her senior year, and like any lively 17-year-old

she had plans for the year — playing in the Jenks Trojan Pride band, hanging out with friends, etc. — and cancer wasn't part of them.

Her junior year had been spent going to doctors appointments — undergoing all sorts of tests, all of which came back normal — to find out the reason for her frequent and painful headaches.

It wasn't until a neurologist ordered an MRI of her brain and saw the results that she learned the reason.

SEE TEEN D4

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# TINY

FROM D1

secretary.

“Tiny houses are to a large degree a response to higher housing costs, and we’ve seen interest increase tremendously over the last few years,” Walker said. “People want to control their own future and own home. It’s an affordable lifestyle.”

The median size of a single-family home in 2014 was 2,506 square feet, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

All of Tulsa Custom Buildings’ floor plans are 400 square feet, not including the loft or front porch, which bump the square footage to 580. And for those who decide to design or build a tiny house themselves, the size can be even smaller than that.

The reasons people are opting for such small living spaces vary, but a sampling of these reasons drew buyers to Tulsa’s first tiny house lot over the lunch hour on Thursday.

One homeowner, Velta Troxell, wants to use a tiny house as a temporary dwelling while she builds a larger home on some property that she owns.

“I have way too much stuff to fit in here,” Troxell, 57, said, examining some kitchen drawers.

Ultimately, she plans to use the tiny home as a guesthouse but also wonders if she’ll become too comfortable in the small space to leave it.

“There’s a lot more to it than I expected,” she said. “I could see how someone could get in one of these and decide, ‘This is enough. This is all I need.’”

Another prospective buyer came to browse because she has a dream of downsizing into a tiny home when she retires.

“My husband thinks I’m crazy, but there’s so much wasted space in houses,” said Bixby resident Kathy Caudle. “We can fill it with furniture and stuff, but what do we really do with it?”

Before Hammock decided to look at tiny homes in Tulsa with her dad, she had been living in an apartment in Texas that was 600 square feet.

She said the tiny homes she saw on Thursday were an ideal size.

“Now it’s just a matter of deciding what I want,” Hammock said.

Out of the three models available at Tulsa Custom Buildings, the Chattahoochee floor plan was Hammock’s favorite.

It offers a screened-in porch and walk-in closet.

As soon as the pair entered the tiny home, they walked over to inspect the loft.

“You could easily put a bed up there and sleep,” John Hammock told his daughter.

She climbed the steps and peered down. “This is great. I could have my own bedroom, and then when a guest comes, they could sleep up here,” she said.

Hammock said the appeal of tiny houses for people her age is their mobility — they come on wheels — and how they help foster a minimalist way of life.

Inside the Chattahoochee tiny house, Hammock touched the wood walls and smiled.

“I love the smell of the wood,” she said. “It smells like home.”



An extension off the kitchen counter provides a dining area, and storage space is built into the stairs leading to a loft in a model “tiny home” at Tulsa Custom Buildings. Photos by STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World



Heidi Leatherland (left) and Velta Troxell look over the porch in one of the model “tiny homes” at Tulsa Custom Buildings. Troxell wants to use a tiny house as a temporary dwelling while she builds a larger home on some property that she owns. “There’s a lot more to it than I expected,” she said. “I could see how someone could get in one of these and decide, ‘This is enough. This is all I need.’”

“Tiny houses are to a large degree a response to higher housing costs, and we’ve seen interest increase tremendously over the last few years. People want to control their own future and own home. It’s an affordable lifestyle.”

**ELAINE WALKER**

on the appeal of small homes



A sign advertises “tiny homes” at Tulsa Custom Buildings. The appeal of tiny houses for many people is their mobility — they come on wheels — and how they help foster a minimalist way of life.



Autumn Morrison (left) talks about the kitchen to Velta Troxell and Heidi Leatherland in one of the model “tiny homes” at Tulsa Custom Buildings.

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# TEEN

FROM D1

“As crazy as it sounds, it was a big relief to know that I wasn’t going crazy like all the doctors told me I was,” said Gerlach, 18, who will major in music education at Tulsa Community College starting in August.

“The whole year leading up to my diagnosis, I would go to doctors and do blood tests and everything would come back normal like everything was fine, and ‘Oh you are just stressed,’ doctors would say. ‘That’s why you are having these headaches,’ and I just knew it wasn’t right,” said the daughter of Janet and Rainier Gerlach.

What she had was a rare intracranial mixed germ cell tumor located in the part of her brain that controls emotions, eating habits and personality, and surgery to remove it was considered too risky, she said.

Her journey from diagnosis last year to remission this summer was a long one, said the teen, who’s a big fan of Oreos and Dr Pepper. She also loves country music, is a little upset about the Blake Shelton-Miranda Lambert divorce, watches the “The Bachelor” and “The Bachelorette,” and loves the reality show “The Kardashians” and isn’t “afraid to say it.”

“I tell people ‘The Kardashians’ are what got me through my cancer treatment because I would watch them when I was doing chemo,” she said, laughing.



Teen Sarah Gerlach, seen at her home in south Tulsa, handled chemotherapy and proton beam therapy radiation to beat cancer during her senior year at Jenks High School. The former Jenks Trojans Pride band member graduated in May and begins her college career this month at Tulsa Community College.

MICHAEL WYKYE/Tulsa World

“I just said I’m going to try to do everything I can to graduate. I was determined to keep a positive energy, a good attitude. I would remind myself every day I can’t give up.”

**SARAH GERLACH**

on pushing herself to finish high school during her cancer treatments

The six rounds of inpatient and outpatient chemotherapy were administered at Saint Francis and, at least for part of it, she was able to go home and sleep in her own bed, she said.

Her goal was to keep up with her class and graduate in May 2015.

And she did. And now, she will major in music education at Tulsa Community College starting in August.

“I just said I’m going to try to do everything I can to graduate,” Gerlach said. “I was determined to keep a positive energy, a good attitude. I would remind myself every day I can’t give up.”

“I never really thought to myself ‘Oh I’m dying. Pity me.’ I never let myself think I was anything but normal. My friends, they helped me a lot. They made me feel normal, which was good. Like whenever I hung out with them, we never talked about it. We just talked about normal things.”

Having met most of her credit requirements early, the senior took English online and attended classes in AP music theory, food prep and nutrition, and band. Gerlach also aided her band director with a program at Jenks East Intermediate Elementary School.

She said throughout her

junior and senior years, she stayed active in the band but there were practices she had to sit out and she didn’t attend competitions that were held during her chemo treatments, she explained.

“Ever since I joined band, music has literally been my life,” said Gerlach, who didn’t have the “crazy” effects many do on chemo but did suffer from fatigue and weak muscles. “In the band ... we’re always together, and we’re doing awesome stuff all the time. Once I was in the band, I was thinking like I would love to do this for the rest of my life, and it’s an option.”

Roughly 10 people in the United States will be diagnosed with her type of cancer every year, according to her physician Dr. Michael Confer at ProCure in Oklahoma City. It usually strikes adolescents, teenagers and young adults and is rare and diverse, making it difficult to study.

The standard treatment is chemotherapy followed by radiation therapy to the entire brain and spinal cord to eliminate microscopic tumor cells in the cerebrospinal fluid. Some 70 percent of patients treated this way will be “cured,” according to Confer. It recurs in about 30 percent of patients.

Gerlach chose to undergo proton beam therapy radiation in Oklahoma City, one of only seven facilities in the country where it is available, rather than traditional radiation because it is more precise.

“I made the decision,” she said. “Proton is safer than the regular X-ray radiation, and it doesn’t damage nearby tissues. It’s targeted toward that area, and it stays in that area.”

Her treatment worked. And she has been “amazing

through it all,” Confer said.

“I lack the vocabulary to fully describe how amazing Sarah has been through all this, but I’ll do my best,” he said in an email this week. “She is an inspiration. She exhibits incredible strength and maturity. She remains witty, pleasant and upbeat. She is simply a joy to be around.”

Gerlach, who recently received the results of her three-month scans and the news that her cancer is in remission, has already enrolled in 17 hours of classes at TCC.

“The tumor is still there but reduced significantly, but they believe it’s just like dead tissue, just a blob. The goal is for it not to grow and then life is good.”

She also wants to bring increase awareness to her type of cancer.

“First off, it only gets 4 percent of the national government funding, which is awful, and if you know anyone with pediatric cancer, they are always talking about how we don’t get enough awareness or support from, in my opinion, the country and the government,” said Gerlach, who raised money selling Team Sarah T-shirts and donated the income to the CureSearch for Children’s Cancer foundation.

“It is so unnoticed. ... I just think we need more awareness of the disease.”

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