



Foundations

A Newsletter from Homes for Our Troops

| www.hfotusa.org

| SUMMER 2014

LET FREEDOM REIGN



Marine Cpl Ammon Lang and family, Port Angeles, Washington outside of their new HFOT home.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty."

- President John F. Kennedy

Returning the sacred gift of freedom to nearly 170 of our nation's most severely injured Veterans through the gift of a specially adapted home has indeed been an outstanding achievement—one made possible through the generous support of Homes for Our Troops' donors and supporters nationwide.

For nearly all of the 1,700 Servicemembers who have returned from war with life-altering injuries, the quest for independence begins in the hallways of Walter Reed, Balboa Naval Hospital, or Brooke Army Medical Center where these once agile and able warriors take to new prosthetics and relearn standing, walking, and reaching. The long-awaited hospital release, a milestone that is reached often 15-24 months post injury, offers a beacon of hope for independence as they say "Thank You" and "Goodbye" to their team of doctors, nurses and around-the-clock caregivers.

However, that hope is quickly diminished upon their arrival home when they find out it is not navigable by wheelchair, and getting in and out of the shower unassisted poses risks of falling and complicating their injuries further. With limited mobility, often confined to one room in the house big enough for their wheelchair, these Veterans experience frustration at their inability to maneuver in their own homes.

Upon receiving news of their acceptance into the Homes for Our Troops program, we see the confidence and resolve return for our Veterans as they begin to dream of living in a fully accessible home. At the Groundbreaking event, our Veterans and their families, with shovels in hand, turn over the inaugural mound of soil at the construction site commencing their journey back to freedom. Months later when the finished home is turned over at a deeply patriotic Key Ceremony. Our Veterans raise the American flag and cut the yellow ribbon for their new home. These are gestures of service and patriotism symbolizing letting go of the ties and barriers that previously inhibited our Heroes from living independently. Yes, freedom in the way of a fully accessible home has arrived at last.

The most special component of our mission, however, is the liberty now given to these warriors to focus on their recovery and pursue new livelihoods or continue their life work of helping others. In this issue we'll introduce you to two Heroes, Justin Bond and Kevin Pannell, each of whom have found different and meaningful ways to serve their country beyond their military careers. And you'll meet two caregiver spouses, Morgan Kessler and Holly Dillmann, who'll reflect on the experience of watching their husbands' journey from injury to independence in their new specially adapted homes.

As we look over our calendar and see the weeks of summer and early fall filled with build event activities, we are excited at the promise of delivering more to our nation's deserving heroes, who have paid the price, are bearing the burden, and meeting the daily hardships. That said, we have a long way to go to complete the mission of getting all severely injured Veterans a specially adapted home to return freedom and independence in their lives. We hope you will join us in fulfilling our duties as Americans this Independence Day by helping Veterans who sacrificed so much while protecting our freedom.

Sincerely



Timothy P. McHale
Major General USA, Ret.
President
Homes for Our Troops



Timothy P. McHale
Major General USA, Ret.
President
Homes for Our Troops



Charity Navigator, one of the premiere charity rating agencies in the country, has awarded Homes for Our Troops with its highest rating of 4 stars.



Homes for Our Troops is a Top-Rated Military & Veteran Charity by the American Institute of Philanthropy.



#12525

Land of the *Free*

HFOT's Scarlet Fanene becomes US Citizen

Retired Army Staff Sergeant Wally Fanene and his wife Scarlet received a new specially adapted home in Temecula, Calif. from HFOT last December. Scarlet has many titles to her credit... Wife, mother, college graduate, and now she can add one more - American citizen.

The journey began in 1986 at age five when she and her family left Cebu City, Philippines by plane to San Diego. "My father was studying medicine and was looking for a better opportunity for our family," says Scarlet. The adjustment wasn't easy. She says American food was not to her liking and there was a huge language barrier. Speaking only Cebuano, Scarlet eventually learned English through ESL (English as a Second Language) classes from Kindergarten through third grade. At home the family also practiced speaking English, prepared American meals, and watched movies in English.

Scarlet and Wally met during high school in 1997, and the couple married in May of 2006. Despite almost losing her husband overseas in an explosion while serving his country in 2007, Scarlet says her life's been blessed.

"I feel complete. I get to spend my life with the man of my dreams, I have two beautiful children and a loving family," she says. On top of that, Scarlet graduated with a bachelor's degree and is now taking pre-nursing classes. "When I was at Walter Reed with Wally, it really gave me a better perspective on how much nurses do for patients and how rewarding it is to nurse someone back to life," she says.

Scarlet looks forward to the freedom her official US citizenship represents. "I'm lucky that I get to live in the Land of the Free where my voice matters and I can make a difference," she says.



About the Fanenes: Army SSG Wallace Fanene lost his right leg and his right arm in an IED blast in Kirkuk, Iraq in September 2007. HFOT presented the Fanenes with the keys to their specially adapted home in Temecula, Calif. in December 2013.

HFOT C.A.R.E.S

Commitment, Accountability, Respect, Excellence, and Service.

In May, the HFOT staff took part in a signing ceremony as part of their commitment to a new organization-wide initiative, HFOT CARES. The initiative represents a culture of core values:

These values reaffirm HFOT's commitment to the Veterans we are privileged to serve, our donors, volunteers, and our people, who are the cornerstone of our organization. Utilizing the HFOT CARES model we continue to develop trusted and committed working relationships with those individuals and institutions who want to help us give back freedom and independence to severely injured Veterans through the gift of specially adapted homes.

Prior to signing their names to the HFOT CARES banner, staff members heard personal accounts from several HFOT Veterans as to how each employee's contributions at HFOT has helped make a difference.



HFOT launches HFOT C.A.R.E.S

Getting by with a little help from our friends...



Christine Lennon, Mike Flannery, Elyssa Noonan and Tony Mendes stuff goodies bags at the HFOT headquarters on a recent Wednesday afternoon.

Here at Homes for Our Troops we have many materials we distribute to our supporters. Those items are packaged and sealed with care by a group of valued volunteers.

Every week several volunteers from the CO-OP Center in Taunton, MA file into HFOT's Headquarters, ready to help with any task they're given.

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, Elyssa Noonan, Christine Lennon, Mike Flannery and Tony Mendes were busy stuffing goodie bags full of magnets, stickers and brochures to be distributed at SPC Geoffrey Quevedo's Groundbreaking Ceremony on July 26.

"I like helping (the Veterans) out. It makes me feel good," Flannery says.

Our Veterans aren't the only ones benefitting from the experience. Plenty of laughter and chatter can be heard while the group works.

"I feel excited when I come here," Noonan says.

CO-OP Instructor Kim LeBreux says the group always leaves HFOT feeling great knowing they've helped the mission. "They enjoy giving back, they like to feel they're a part of something," she says.

*We're always looking for volunteers at events and to hold fundraisers.
For more information visit: www.hfotusa.org/ways-to-support-our-mission*

DOING THEIR PART TO HELP GIVE BACK FREEDOM

KOHLER®

Did you know?

All HFOT homes are equipped with over 150 special adaptations, several of which are furnished by our corporate sponsors such as Kohler. Here are some of the offerings designed by Kohler that make life's daily activities in the kitchen and bathrooms easier for our Veterans and their families:

- Digital Thermostatic Valve (DTV) prompts in bathrooms control water temperature, a helpful feature for Veterans with prosthetic arms who cannot sense the water temperature for themselves or their children at bath time
- Therapeutic massage tub in master bathroom that helps relieve aching muscles at the end of the day
- Bidet system with touchless technology for master toilet
- Sensate pull down faucet in the kitchen eliminates the need to stretch out far for the faucet, mitigating the Veteran's risks of falling from the wheelchair



Kohler products help HFOT families with a range of daily activities many of us take for granted.

What Freedom means to me...

HFOT Kids Speak Out

Freedom means being able to be my own person. And dance like no one's looking.

Rachel Stein, (10) daughter of CPL Joshua and Nikki Stein

Freedom means that you are free to live how you want. That you are free from worrying about being captured or treated badly. Our soldiers give us that freedom to feel safe.

Christy Lynn Slate, (10) daughter of Army SSG Woody and Sandra Slate

We can choose what we can be, and not have someone choose for us.

Maddy Wood, (9) daughter of Army SGT Travis and Stephanie Wood



Alex Dillmann and his wife Holly have both experienced new freedoms since moving into their specially adapted home in December.

On an ordinary day Alex Dillmann can be found working out in his garage or cooking breakfast for his wife Holly. Only six months ago he was not able to do any of these activities in his own home.

Alex was presented his specially adapted home in Tampa, FL by Homes for Our Troops in December 2013. Since then he has regained freedoms he lost after becoming paralyzed from the chest down in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast while deployed to Afghanistan in 2011.

Before moving into the home, daily tasks were a challenge for Alex. If he wanted to cook breakfast, the night before he and Holly would have to make sure everything he needed was left on the counter. If they forgot, he would have to wake Holly up. He couldn't take a shower on his own without having Holly lift him into his chair. Even answering the door was a challenge because there was a step-up to get to the door. If they were expecting important packages, they would have to schedule them around a time Holly was home.

Now, with pull-down cabinets and low counters, Alex can have breakfast ready for Holly before she even gets up. He can shower without assistance in his roll-in shower and can easily access every room while in his wheelchair.

Alex now has the time for his goals and interests. He's been focusing on getting back to school and has the room to workout in his own home and he has returned to gunsmithing, one of his favorite hobbies.

Working on guns and reloading ammunition has been extremely good therapy for Alex. "He enjoys doing it and it makes him feel as if he still has a connection to his life prior to sustaining his combat injuries," Holly says. "It has given us so much peace of mind and has taken so much stress off of both of us."

Now that Holly does not have to worry about Alex's safety or not being able to get to certain things he may need when she's not there, she has the ability to take time for herself. She recently started taking ballet classes.

A New Kind of

FREEDOM



Alex and Holly Dillmann pictured during their Groundbreaking in January 2013.

Visit www.hfotusa.org to read more stories of how your support is helping HFOT restore freedom and independence to our nation's most severely injured Veterans.

DIGGING OUT FROM DISASTER

When disaster, in the way of a series of tornadoes, struck Arkansas last April, HFOT home recipient Kevin Pannell felt compelled to help. When he heard about a Veterans' group, Team Rubicon, that was gearing up to help with the recovery efforts, he packed his bags and joined them.

Taking part in "Operation Rising Eagle" with Team Rubicon, Pannell did everything from sledge hammering, operating demolition trucks, removing debris and trees, and hugging and comforting displaced residents. Pannell says his team managed to get "some very personal, very irreplaceable" items back to their owners in the hardest hit areas in Faulkner County.

"It's unbelievable that we got the response and emotional gratitude from the victims of this storm that we did," he says.

Pannell, who lost both legs in a grenade attack in Iraq in 2004, was also grateful for the chance to serve once again with his brothers in arms. Says Pannell, "The generosity and moral fortitude that they exhibited exemplifies what makes military members so special," says Pannell.

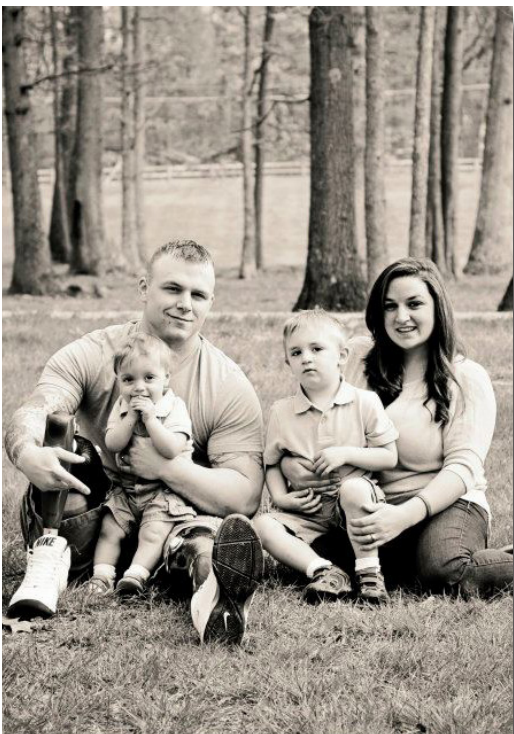
Collectively, Pannell and the team of Veterans racked up over 40,000 hours of volunteer time.

[Army SPC Kevin Pannell](#) received the keys to his HFOT home in December of 2010.



HFOT Veteran Kevin Pannell helps with tornado recovery efforts in Arkansas with Team Rubicon.

OUR FOREVER HOME!



The Kessler family, Rising Sun, Md.

Dear HFOT,

We would love to start by saying we LOVE our HFOT home. It has changed our lives forever. From the doorways to the roll-under counters to the walkway outside, everything about our home is amazing. We cannot thank you enough for what you have done-for not only Jeff, but for our whole family. When you commit to building a home for a Veteran you not only help the Veteran you help the families also. I cannot express how thankful we are for our forever home.

Jeffrey is amazed how well he can get around the house in his wheelchair. He says it's such a smooth ride now on hardwood floors. He was falling a lot living with the carpet that we had in the old house and in our new home he hasn't fallen ONCE!

Jeffrey couldn't live without the wheel-in shower or widened doorways. The shower is so easy for him to get in and out of, and it's nice no longer having to worry about his wheelchair fitting throughout the hallways or Jeffrey hitting his hands on walls and doorways.

We are so happy he doesn't have to worry about his mobility anymore and can focus on family.

-Morgan Kessler, wife of [Marine Cpl Jeffrey Kessler](#)

A second chance at **SERVING**

A bid at political office takes HFOT's Justin Bond from country to county

A life-altering injury he sustained in Iraq ended his Army career, but now Justin Bond is hoping to serve his country at the local level. Bond is now in the running for California's Kings County District 4 Board of Supervisors after he won a preliminary election securing his spot on the November 2014 ballot.

His first priority if elected? Lowering the cost of the water for residents. He's already started working on that. In May 2014, Bond called a town hall meeting and within two weeks had secured a \$330,000 grant to help acquire a new well that will be used to lower rates. "That is what a boots on the ground, cut out the red tape mentality will get you," he says.

If elected to the Board of Supervisors, Bond's duties will include voting on the county budget and new business matters, hiring and firing all nonelected department heads, and developing plans for services such as water and sewer. Says Bond, "I will now have a platform to speak and to vote on Veteran issues and other issues as well."

Bond re-enlisted with the Army immediately following the attacks on 9/11. While serving as a gunner in 2004 supporting the battle of Fallujah, Bond was hit with an AK-47 round directly through the center of both knees.

Doctors were forced to amputate his left leg above the knee. Since then he's endured over 30 surgeries and now has a metal pelvis, hip, and tail bone.

He says the specially adapted home provided to him by HFOT in 2011 has been a huge help in allowing him to focus on his recovery and seize opportunities to reach his fullest potential in life. The home was also a godsend to return to after campaigning door to door for hours on end when phantom pain and prosthetic discomfort set in.

When Bond is not busy lending an ear to constituents, he's usually lending a hand to HFOT by speaking at Groundbreakings and other corporate engagements to raise awareness for the cause. Last April he was invited to a movie premiere in L.A. and talked to audience members about the role that organizations like HFOT have in helping injured Veterans and reducing the numbers of Veteran suicide.

Preparing for this new leadership role in his community has convinced him of two things. Explains Bond, "I don't have to quit serving and there is more work to be done on the homefront."

Good luck Justin!

"I don't have to quit serving and there is more work to be done on the homefront."

- Justin Bond



Justin Bond during his campaign for Board of Supervisors in California's King County.

On the road with HFOT's Ashley Twigg, Community Outreach Coordinator

As a Community Outreach Coordinator (COC) for Homes for Our Troops, Ashley Twigg is responsible for planning every element of our Veterans' Groundbreaking Ceremonies, Volunteer Days, and Key Ceremonies all over the country. She's run over 35 events during the 18 months she's been at HFOT, and has learned some valuable life lessons on the road. Here are a few of them.

1. Expect delays. Flight departure and arrival times tend to be more wishful thinking than factual. On occasion, I've been grounded for 3 hours in Georgia, stranded overnight in Baltimore, and at times, found eating Twizzlers while lounging on the ground at Dulles because my homebound plane was mysteriously missing a flight crew.

2. Don't get attached to any shoes. Sometimes it really does rain (and occasionally even snows) on your parade. If a blizzard brings a foot of snow or a rainstorm blows away your event tent, you will find a way to make it work with your acquired troubleshooting expertise. However, those UGG boots or ballet flats may not live to see another event.

3. Realize not every baby will like you. At HFOT, we view ourselves as one big family. Sometimes the smallest family members we meet at our events may take some convincing.

4. You can't always rely on watches. Veteran arrival time to the event may fluctuate if they are coming by Bat Mobile or horse drawn carriage.

5. Check your pockets. When you give the Veteran the keys to his new home, don't leave the spare set in your pocket and then head for the airport. If this does happen, don't worry, you will only make this mistake once.

6. Always double knot. It takes two people to properly fold the American flag. If the rope on the flag pole comes untied and flies back up to the top, then it takes about six people to get it back down. Plan accordingly.

7. Just breathe...and smile. Even the most stressful, crazy, hectic days are still worth it because you are able to do something that truly matters every single day to each Veteran, family, and community we visit.



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- Email and newsletter updates on how your donation is helping HFOT's mission of Building Homes, Rebuilding Lives
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**A minimum of \$10 per month is required to enroll as a Charter member*

www.hfotusa.org

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