



# Foundations

A Newsletter from Homes for Our Troops | [www.hfotusa.org](http://www.hfotusa.org) | SEPTEMBER 2015

## BEARING THE WEIGHT FOR POST 9/11 VETERANS



*HFOT home recipient and Army Veteran, Earl Granville, at a recent event to raise awareness for Veteran suicide prevention.*

# It Starts with a Conversation

Army Veteran Earl Granville Gets the Message out About Mental Health, Suicide Awareness

Earl Granville is a conversation starter. Some days it is the kilt and gas mask combination he fashions through city streets that gets people talking. Other days it might be the thick chains and cinder block (aptly named “Cindy”) he carries while crawling on a prosthetic leg through muddy endurance challenges that gets him noticed.

The former Army Sergeant is at ease speaking to strangers about his tours in Bosnia, Iraq and the last one in Afghanistan where he lost his left leg in 2008 to a roadside bomb. But weighing heavily on his mind most days is another tragic loss — the 22 American Veterans who die by suicide every day. It is a loss that cuts deeply for Granville, whose twin brother Joe, also an Army Soldier, took his own life in 2010.

Granville now shares his story with thousands every year in an effort to champion mental health and suicide-prevention awareness.

“It’s time to get rid of that stigma and use the resources we have,” says Granville. His message to all, especially his brothers and sisters in arms: “There is no shame is asking for help. There is no shame in receiving help,” he says.

Granville received a specially adapted home from Homes for Our Troops in Scranton, Pa., in December 2013. The home serves as his basecamp between endurance challenges or “rucks”, in which he walks miles with a weighted backpack, symbolizing the burden that many Veterans carry post-war or post-trauma. Many of the group rucks are coordinated by *Carry The Fallen*, a nonprofit organization dedicated to reducing Veteran suicide and assisting military families.

In addition to raising awareness about suicide prevention, Granville has chosen to live a life that honors his two friends and fellow Servicemembers, Major Scott Hagerty of Stillwater, Okla. and Specialist Derek Holland of Wind Gap, Pa., who were killed next to him in the explosion.



Earl Granville rucking for Veteran suicide prevention awareness.

Granville has also been featured in several newspaper and TV interviews, including a PBS National Memorial Day Concert in which actors Joe Mantegna and Gary Sinise performed a dramatic reading portraying him and his brother Joe on stage. Granville’s journey will also be included in a documentary titled *Power of One: Preventing Suicide in America*. Says Granville, “It was an experience that will help me continue my mission of sharing my brother’s legacy and getting my message out to others battling their own mental demons.”

For more information on Earl, visit: [www.hfotusa.org/Granville](http://www.hfotusa.org/Granville).



Granville (L) leading the charge to help Veterans.

# A Heartbreaking Loss on 9/11 and a Kind Gesture Serve as Reminders to Pay It Forward



On September 11, 2001, Cindy McGinty lost her husband Mike during the attacks on the World Trade Center. The couple was living in Foxboro, Mass., at the time with their two sons, Daniel and David. Mike, an insurance broker for Marsh McLennan, had a meeting in the World Trade Center that day.

Mike was a Navy Veteran, and grew up in a military family. Their home in Foxboro was the first house they had ever owned, and Mike took pride in caring for the lawn and garden.

In the weeks following the attack, Cindy worried that everyone in town would drive by her home and know that “the widow McGinty” lived there just by the looks of her yard. One day, she looked out the window and saw local Boy Scout leader, HFOT’s Deputy Director of Corporate Sponsorship and Community Engagement, Chris Mitchell, mowing her lawn. He told her to take care of her kids, and he would take care of the lawn.

On the first Mother’s Day after the attacks, Chris showed up with his Scouts to re-landscape the entire front yard and plant a tree in Mike’s memory. Chris continued to mow her lawn regularly, never accepting payment, until she moved eight years later.

Cindy has chosen to “pay forward” this kind gesture and honor her husband’s memory by becoming a member of HFOT’s monthly giving program, Operation Lasting Support (OLS). “It is important to support the brave men and women who stepped up to keep our country safe,” Cindy says.

Each month, Cindy knows her gift is helping HFOT provide injured Veterans and their families with the customized homes they need, along with additional

support such as home warranty guidance and financial planning.

Cindy says that the terrorist attacks on 9/11 were an attempt to tear our country apart, but she feels that our nation’s Servicemembers proudly stood up to this evil, and Americans have collectively responded with simple acts of human kindness. Her commitment to HFOT’s mission is a way for her to do the same. “It is important that we continue to show that they did not win,” she says.



*HFOT’s Chris Mitchell and Cindy McGinty.*

# Laying the Groundwork for Success

*A specially adapted home will allow SGT Joshua Wetzel to complete his education and expand his family.*



*Homes for Our Troops broke ground on Joshua Wetzel's home in Auburn, Alabama in June. Construction is expected to be complete by next spring.*

After being at class all day, Army Sergeant Joshua Wetzel looks forward to relaxing with his wife Paige, and their young daughter Harper. However, reading his daughter a bedtime story or cooking a meal for Paige are daily tasks that he cannot do easily in the family's current home.

On May 31, 2012, Joshua lost both legs in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast while serving in Afghanistan. After leaving the hospital, he and Paige were tasked with finding a place suited to his needs, something not easily done in southern communities where homes are almost 100 years old. The closest they could find was a two-bedroom, ground level condo. The non-customized living space has its challenges. The floors are carpeted, making it hard for Joshua to maneuver his wheelchair. Additionally, the counter tops and cabinets in the kitchen are too high.

Fortunately these obstacles will be eliminated soon. Homes for Our Troops recently broke ground on their specially adapted home in Auburn, Alabama. Construction is projected to be complete by next spring. "Being able to

come home, relax and play with my daughter without any obstacles is a huge morale booster. I believe that is the key to being successful in anything," Joshua says.

Meanwhile, Joshua is transitioning back into academic life and is studying marketing at Auburn University. "Now that I am older and have more of a purpose to graduate, it is easier to focus on my studies," he says. After he graduates next May, Joshua plans to pursue a master's in sports management.



*Joshua and Paige Wetzel.*

If the couple were to build or renovate a home on their own, Joshua would have to put his education on hold to be able to afford it. They also hope to have more children, something they would not be able to do in their current home due to limited space. "The peace of mind that comes with knowing that we can expand as a family without panicking is truly irreplaceable," he says. Best of all, Joshua says it will be comforting to know that he can stay home alone without Paige worrying about his

safety, and the couple won't need to move elsewhere as he ages.

**For more information about Joshua Wetzel, visit: [www.hfotusa.org/wetzel](http://www.hfotusa.org/wetzel).**

# SPOTLIGHT ON HFOT'S LAND ACQUISITION TEAM



*From left: Property Transfer Manager John Silvia, Land Acquisition Manager Cheryl Peterson and Land Specialists Suzanna Sullivan and Mike Cogliano.*

Deciding where to live is no easy task for anyone. Add ADA compliance and VA guidelines to the mix, and the job becomes even more challenging. Fortunately, Homes for Our Troops has a skilled Land Acquisition Department with team members ready to find our Veterans the perfect plots.

Once a Veteran enters the Homes for Our Troops program, the first task is to decide on the city or town they want to call "home." Their preferences are usually based on climate, family and proximity to jobs and healthcare. After a Veteran chooses a location, the land specialists set to work on finding the Veteran a parcel that meets his or her wishes and the VA's requirements. The Land Department consists of Property Transfer Manager John Silvia, Land Acquisition Manager Cheryl Peterson and Land Specialists Michael Cogliano and Suzanna Sullivan.

A typical day for Peterson, Cogliano and Sullivan begins with searching online for land. Each parcel must be analyzed for slope, size, zoning restrictions, availability of utilities and access. They also work with local vendors, including civil engineers, surveyors and geotechnical engineers to obtain site plans and soil reports that are required for each home HFOT builds.

Peterson, who joined the organization in early 2015, says she has found so much enthusiasm and support for HFOT's mission in many of the communities she has encountered. "It is not uncommon for vendors to donate a portion or all of their services, which just gives me more motivation and excitement about coming to work every day," she says.

Sullivan has seen the HFOT build process firsthand, long before joining the organization this past spring.

Her brother, Marine Sergeant Joshua Bouchard, received his HFOT home in January 2013. After her brother was injured, Sullivan wanted to help Veterans using her experience and education in geology. When she learned about the land specialist position, she knew it would be a perfect fit. "I hope to provide our Veterans with the best lots that accommodate their exact needs and wants," she says. "I know much time, care and commitment went into making my brother feel comfortable in his home, and it all started with finding the right lot."

Cogliano, who joined the organization in 2011, finds the work humbling. "No matter how difficult my job may get, I can never and could never give the Veterans back what they gave up for us," he says.

Property Transfer Manager, John Silvia is a part of the build process from land search all the way through to home completion. He works directly with HFOT's Construction Operations, Program Support, and the Land Acquisition Team to ensure that all parcels meet HFOT's guidelines and standards. Silvia joined the team in 2011 wanting to be a part of an organization that makes a positive impact. "It is very rewarding professionally and personally to be a part of an organization that provides homes to our Veterans and helps them rebuild their lives," he says.

**To learn more about where HFOT is building, visit: [www.hfotusa.org/map](http://www.hfotusa.org/map).**

# The Jacque Keeslar Story

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Fourteen years after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the significance of this horrific day has never dulled from our minds. It represents the cornerstone of our mission. For many of the Veterans we serve at Homes for Our Troops, this monumental act of terrorism was the call that impelled them to enlist and serve in the United States military.

Homes for Our Troops is proud to present the second episode of our  
**Rebuilding Lives Video Collection: The Jacque Keeslar Story.**

We dedicate this video to Jacque and his wife Vanessa, and the thousands of Servicemembers and their families nationwide who have made sacrifices while protecting our liberties overseas since September 11, 2001.

