



# Foundations

A Newsletter from Homes for Our Troops | [www.hfotusa.org](http://www.hfotusa.org) | SPRING 2014



# YEARS STRONG

A DECADE OF LIFE-CHANGING WORK | 2004-2014

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Dear Friends,

February 24 marked the 10th Anniversary of Homes for Our Troops. Over the last decade, more than 160 specially adapted homes have been donated to our nation's most severely injured veterans. This year we are positioned to present the 200th home.

We've been tremendously successful these first 10 years, but this success should not be measured by numbers alone. Homes for Our Troops continues to restore freedom and independence to veterans who have sustained injuries so severe, traditional homes no longer provide them a sanctuary, but are a daily reminder of the challenges to be faced for the rest of their lives. Our mission enlightens each community, in which these homes are built, providing individuals the opportunity to "give back" to those who have sacrificed so much. It attracts skilled workers to build homes that enable our veterans to rebuild their lives.

The stories that mark the past decade are too numerous to recount, but the difference made by donors, supporters, volunteers, and countless others is apparent on a daily basis. There is no shortage of milestones and miracles that have occurred during this over the last 10 years. Below are a small few I'd like to share:

- 2004 – Homes for Our Troops is incorporated and breaks ground on its first home
- 2005 – The first home is donated to Army Sergeant Peter Damon of Middleborough, MA
- 2007 – Musician Billy Joel releases the single "Christmas in Fallujah," donating \$500,000 to HFOT
- 2008 – Homes are built in the host cities of the Republican and Democratic National Conventions
- 2010 – The 100 More Homes for Our Troops Campaign is launched
- 2011 – The 100th home build project occurs in Fredericksburg, VA for Marine Corporal Kenny Lyon

Our past has shaped the future of this organization. In this newsletter, we'll share the success stories of our veterans and how their lives have changed – and improved – as a result of the gift they received– a gift which would not have been possible if not for your generosity. You'll be reintroduced to 2008 HFOT home recipient Andrew Robinson and his wife, who were able to pursue their dream of parenthood through advanced fertility treatments; something that would not have been possible if the couple was burdened with a home mortgage. We'll also reintroduce you to Pisey Tan, who received his home in 2007. In addition to the birth of his two children, Pisey says the greatest benefit of his specially adapted home is his ability to take a truly active part in the care and parenting of his children.

In this issue, you'll be introduced to a young photographer hired by HFOT, whose involvement in several Georgia home-build projects turned into a life-changing experience. You'll also meet one of our youngest donors in Texas, who traded the pomp and circumstance of a Sweet Sixteen birthday party into an opportunity to raise funds and awareness for our veterans.

Inspiration has known no bounds – from those working in our Massachusetts headquarters who make the day-to-day decisions, to our veterans whose undefeatable heroic spirit is validated through their daily living, to the contributions of volunteer organizations such as the Patriot Riders and the Blue Star Mothers, to our corporate sponsors and donors who witness the exquisite value in each dollar spent to provide the gift of freedom and independence.

As we look ahead to the next decade, we realize Homes for Our Troops needs the continued, nurturing support of municipalities, corporations, foundations, and volunteers, those individuals who are able to donate or those who can simply spread the word. What will we see when we look back in 2023? That is not left only to Homes for Our Troops' staff and Board, but to the veterans and communities that help make these houses true homes for our Heroes. With your help I know we will be just as proud in 10 years as we are today.

Sincerely,



**Richard A. Cody**  
General USA, Ret.  
Chairman of the Board  
Homes for Our Troops



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General USA, Ret.  
Chairman of the Board  
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

# 2004 - 2014

Homes for Our Troops is proud of the work done in the last decade, a legacy evidenced by nearly 200 veterans all whose lives have been profoundly changed through the gift of a specially adapted home.

Here are a few of their amazing stories.

## Our Dream Is Now a Reality

Life changed in an instant for former Marine Staff Sergeant Andrew Robinson on June 20, 2006 when insurgents attacked his vehicle with an improvised explosive device (IED) in a convoy in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. The blast left him with compound fractures to his lower legs, collapsed lungs and a fractured vertebra, rendering him paralyzed from the chest down with partial paralysis in his arms.

But in 2008, Robinson's life changed again - for the better - when HFOT presented him with a specially adapted home complete with a specialized lift system.

"With my home from Homes for Our Troops I can easily access every room," says Robinson. "I can get in and out of bed and the shower on my own with the use of the ceiling lift."

In addition to the physical freedom he enjoys in his home, Robinson is equally grateful for the freedom of worry his mortgage-free home represents, too.

Because of the injuries he sustained in combat, Robinson says it was necessary for his wife Sara to pursue advanced fertility treatments, costs of which are not covered by the Veterans Administration.

"Between procedures, medications, and trips to see specialized doctors in Miami, it took over \$15,000 to make our dream of raising children a reality," he adds. Saving that amount would have been nearly impossible with a monthly mortgage or rent payment for the couple, who are now proud parents of twins Collin and Leah.

"When I look at my life today it is difficult to imagine my life without this amazing blessing from Homes for Our Troops as well as hundreds of volunteers that gave their time, money, and resources in that effort," he says.



The Robinson family, Florence, N.J.

***"With my home from Homes for Our Troops I can easily access every room."***

**-Marine Staff Sergeant Andrew Robinson**

## HFOT MILESTONES 2004-2014

HFOT founded



2004

- First specially adapted home completed
- HFOT teams up with TV's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*
- Phil Mickelson helps with Birdies for the Brave

2005





# Freedom to Be a *Family Man*

*The Tan Family, Philadelphia, Pa.*

Freedom for Pisey Tan, can be measured in inches. Six to be exact.

Like many other HFOT home recipients, Pisey Tan is grateful for the fact that he can freely navigate his wheelchair through the doorways at home, which are expanded an extra six inches over that of traditional homes. This seemingly insignificant measurement between door frames is nearly invisible to those who walk through, but to Tan, it's a harbinger of pride and independence.

"The best thing about the home is being able to help raise the family with my wife," says Tan. "It gives me the chance to be the man I wanted to be before my injuries, also letting me be the father I never had."

Tan and Sieng Nai have been married five years; they have two daughters Alyssa, 5, and Isabella, 1. The family lives

in the specially adapted home that HFOT built for Tan in 2006 in Philadelphia.

Tan was severely injured on his second deployment with the 3rd Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, when his vehicle was struck by an improvised explosive device (IED).

After both legs were later surgically amputated, Tan worried about becoming a burden to friends and family, especially to his younger brother who had to carry him upstairs to bed.

"The idea of me, once a strong and very independent soldier, now a broken man that needs his mother and brother to do the simplest thing such as walking up and down the stairs was truly a depressing point in my life," Tan says.

Then there was the physical pain he endured every day that came from not being able to use his wheelchair.

"The only way I got around in my old home was scooting around on my butt," says Tan, who recalls being so physically exhausted and sore that he could barely move let alone slip on his prosthetics.

"Now I am able to move about the home and do things, such as putting my children on my lap while in my wheelchair and take them to their room and put them down in their own bed to sleep."

That room-to-room accessibility, made possible by a six-inch modification, gives Tan the freedom to be the happy, proud family man he is today.

"Being able to be there for every part of my children's lives, even just putting them to sleep, really is a life changer."

- Billy Joel releases "Christmas in Fallujah," donates \$500k
- HFOT completes four homes

2006



2007

- HFOT completes eight home-build projects

# Life,

## Almost As It Should Be

### A letter of thanks from Ivonne Thompson

*Ivonne is the wife and caregiver of HFOT veteran, former Naval Petty Officer Anthony Thompson, and mother to Anthony Jr. (AJ). Anthony sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and an incomplete spinal cord injury after a suicide bomber detonated an explosive near him and his fellow Marines.*

Life is full of uncertainties for a wounded warrior and his family. Setbacks in health are often inevitable, but what should not be a setback in the life of a wounded warrior and his family is going home after a life-altering change. For Anthony, AJ and I, going home was the best thing that could have ever happened to us; well, besides being put into contact with Homes for Our Troops.

After almost four years of Anthony being an inpatient and AJ and I living in Fisher Homes and hotels, we were ready for some stability and togetherness. AJ never knew what it was like to live in a home that was "ours." And that's exactly what we received from HFOT on December 7, 2010, the day all three of us were FINALLY able to live together as a family under one roof.

The instant that Anthony set wheels in his new home, he seemed at peace and relaxed. I continued to assure him that he was safe; as I always do in a new environment, and told him that we were finally "Home."

Since he was first injured, Anthony had lived his life under fluorescent lighting with a plethora of doctors and professionals constantly in his face. But being home now means no doctors around and wondering if I had learned everything I needed to know to care for Anthony. It was overwhelming and almost surreal. What gave me peace of mind, though, was knowing that this would be our forever home and that I didn't need to worry about anything except my boys.

The equipment and customizations put into the home for Anthony made everything a little easier.

Getting him in and out of bed every day is a breeze with his lift, and there is plenty of space in his room to allow for his chair and the whole family at once. Anthony has no boundaries and that makes me happy and relieved.



*The Thompson family, Houston, Texas.*

It's been three years since we came home and I couldn't have asked for anything better. We continue to live happily as a family under one roof. AJ wakes every morning and runs to his dad's room to say good morning. Before bedtime every night, he climbs in bed with his dad with his PJ's on, and tells him all about his day, then says goodnight and seals it with a hug and lots of kisses. Life is almost as it should be, but more importantly, the one certainty we have is we are happy and HOME!

- HFOT builds homes as part of Republican and Democrat National Conventions



2008

- Team HFOT runs Boston Marathon, raises 100K
- HFOT earns "A" rating from Charity Watch

## MISSION MOMENTS



# *That Magic* **(HFOT)** *Moment*

Kate Awtrey's not exaggerating when she tells friends that the earth moved the day she met Marine Cpl David King - the man she will marry. That's because the couple met on Dec. 15, 2012 at HFOT's Groundbreaking event in Hawkinsville, Ga., for Marine Cpl Tony Mullis' specially adapted home.

Awtrey, who's a professional photographer, was hired by HFOT to cover the event that day when she caught the attention of King, a member of the Color Guard detachment that presented the colors before the ceremony.

"I was packing my stuff up and getting ready to leave later," Awtrey explains. "Then Dave approached me and said, 'Could I get a copy of that photo you took of me and my buddies in the color guard?'"

The two subsequently emailed after the holidays, and then made plans to get together when King returned home on leave. They then had their first date in February 2013.

"My mom asked me the day after our date how it went, and I said, 'Oh it was great. I am going to marry him,'" says Awtrey.

Awtrey's gut proved right nine months later, on November 9, 2013, when King proposed to her just before the Marine Corps Ball, the surprise moment captured on camera by Awtrey's brother. Wedding bells will ring for Awtrey and King on May 24, 2014 in Blue Ridge, Ga. A 1950's inspired garden party is planned.

*Disclaimer: We're not promising you'll meet your soul-mate, but attending an HFOT event can be life-changing. Find out what events are going on in your area by visiting [www.hfotusa.org](http://www.hfotusa.org).*



**Kate Awtrey and fiance Marine Cpl David King.**

- First LEED-H certified home (Green Building Program) built



- HFOT's Texas 3-Star Key Ceremony presents homes to three veterans on 9/11

**2009**

# CANINE COMFORT

*For HFOT's Austin and Donna Burchard, their dog Chase is more than just a pet*

There are three comforts that make Austin Burchard's life as an injured veteran a little easier. As an Army Sergeant who was left a paraplegic from a gunshot wound he received in Afghanistan in 2009, the first of those would be his loving wife of almost 11 years and dedicated caretaker Donna.

Next would be the couple's specially adapted home in Lutz, Florida that they received from HFOT in September, 2011. The third comes in the form of canine intervention - a golden retriever named Chase, Austin's trained service dog.

"Chase is my extension when I need him to make up for what my injury has taken," Austin explains.

Chase can open doors, turn on lights, fetch if Austin dropped something or needs something, and steady Austin if he falls out of his chair to help him get back in.

That help is a huge relief to Donna. "Chase does so much for Austin. It gives me the peace of mind that they are okay and safe out in public," she says.



*Austin Burchard and his service dog Chase.*

The Burchards received Chase through the national non-profit, National Education for Assistance Dog Services (NEADS). Chase's training on basic commands and behaviors began with a trainer as a puppy, with additional training received through the Prison Pup Program in Rhode Island. After 18 months, Austin was flown to Massachusetts and trained with Chase for two weeks; the two "graduated" in October 2011, and have been inseparable since.

During days that are pain or stress filled, Chase guards Austin to protect him so others won't bother him. Chase is also trained to respond to Donna, who mastered Chase's commands for occasions when Austin is ill or hospitalized. So Chase keeps a watchful eye on Donna, too, if she falls behind while they're out walking.

Through his injuries and subsequent two years of hospitalization and countless surgeries, Austin remains grateful. "I don't know where I would be without our home, my wife and Chase," he says.

***"Chase is my extension when I need him to make up for what my injury has taken."***

**-Austin Burchard**



*HFOT recipients Austin and Donna Burchard.*

## 2010

- HFOT receives 4-star rating from Charity Navigator
- HFOT launches *100 More Campaign* at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville



- HFOT builds its 100<sup>th</sup> home for Sgt Kenny Lyon

## 2011

# TOP 10 FUNDRAISERS OF 2013

## Charles River Country Club

Their *Military Appreciation Night* featured dinner, silent auction, and an energetic live auction to raise funds for Cpl Kevin Dubois' home in Rhode Island. **Total: \$183,360**

## Rudy's Texas Bar-B-Q

*Camo Cups for a Cause* Campaign raised funds and awareness for SPC Justin Perez-Gorda's project. **Total: \$84,349**

## Tracy Burk - PA

Tracy, mother-in-law of HFOT recipient Zach Stinson, corralled the community of Chambersburg, PA to host events like chicken dinners and motorcycle poker runs to raise funds for Zach's new home. **Total: \$77,286**

## Texas Roadhouse Bike Run

The restaurant chain held its 10th Annual Bike Run last August, and conducted in-store fundraising and a motorcycle raffle at various locations. Texas Roadhouse has also been a longtime supporter of HFOT, providing volunteers and lunches at its community events across the country. **Total: \$76,247**

## Swings for Soldiers Golf Classic

The fourth annual golf tournament event with NFL player Jacob Tamme and his wife Allison was held to raise funds for SPC Brett Bondurant's specially adapted home in Indiana. **Total: \$73,523**

## Systems Made Simple

This technology services company chose HFOT as the beneficiary of their annual Golf Classic in May, for LCpl Nick Thom's home in Virginia. **Total: \$70,000**

## The Home for Cpl Brandon Rumbaugh Golf Tournament

Joe D'Ambrosio hosted the *Home for Cpl Brandon Rumbaugh Golf Tournament* in Pittsburgh over the summer to support Brandon's new specially adapted home. **Total: \$42,240**

## NY CoreNet Global Annual Golf Outing

The New York City Chapter of CoreNet Global held its annual golf outing at Old Oaks Country Club in July and chose to support Sgt Luis Remache's home in New York that will be built later this year. **Total: \$40,710**

## Dallas Fort Worth Clay Shoot

The Dallas Fort Worth Volunteer Network hosted its fourth annual sporting clays event last March to raise funds and awareness for HFOT's mission. **Total: \$40,697**

## Spartan Race

Spartan Race organizers continued their support for HFOT by donating a portion of proceeds from registration fees collected from their series of obstacle racing challenges throughout the country. **Total: \$38,852**

**NFL Player Jacob Tamme and his wife Allison (center) at the Swings for Soldiers Golf Classic with (left to right) HFOT recipients Kenneth Harker, Brett Bondurant, and Chase Mathews.**



## 2012

- Oprah recommends HFOT on *16 Ways to Make an Incredible Impact*



- HFOT awards seven homes during *Homes for the Holidays*



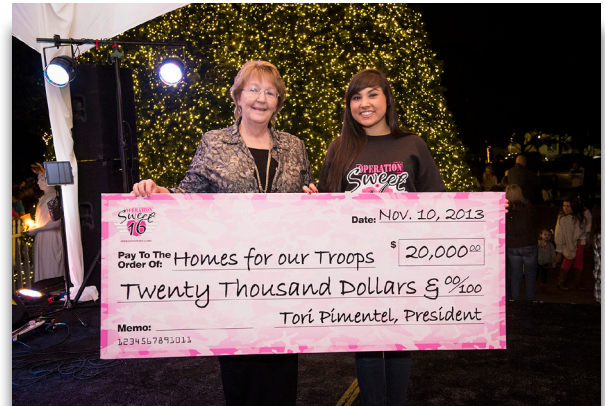
# Sweet 16... and Helping the Troops

There was a lot of money involved with Tori Pimentel's 16th birthday, but it wasn't for reasons you might think. She didn't plan a lavish party at a swanky venue and there was no arrival by elephant or other circus animals. Instead of raising a ruckus the Dallas-Fort Worth teen decided to raise funds and awareness to honor the sacrifices of our nation's military.

Pimentel, who was turning 16 on March 16, 2012, decided to launch a fundraising campaign called "Operation Sweet 16," setting a lofty goal of raising \$16,000 before the big day.

With the help of friends and family and community support, she ended up exceeding her goal.

Last November she presented a donation to Homes for Our Troops in the amount of \$20,000, funds she raised by hosting a series of spirit nights at local restaurants and fashion shows. Congrats Tori and on behalf of the veterans your donation will help us serve - thank you!



Tori Pimentel (r) presents a check from her nonprofit "Operation Sweet 16." Also pictured: HFOT Volunteer Carol Self.

Homes for Our Troops is proud to announce that CertainTeed Roofing has made a three-year commitment to Homes for Our Troops, which includes the donation of roofing materials for all HFOT homes across the U.S.

"We are proud to be a partner to Homes for Our Troops, an organization that has filled a true need for those who have made such a huge sacrifice for our country, giving them the ability to live more independently," said Tom Smith, president of CertainTeed Roofing.

"This donation of high quality CertainTeed roofing materials will contribute to a low maintenance lifestyle for many years to come."

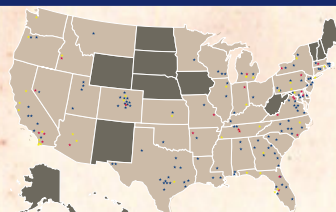
A subsidiary of Saint-Gobain, the world's largest building products company, CertainTeed and its affiliates have more than 6,000 employees and more than 65 manufacturing facilities throughout the United States and Canada.

## CertainTeed SAINT-GOBAIN Roofing



CertainTeed roofing, shown here on the home for Marine Cpl Ammon Lang and family in Port Angeles, WA.

- HFOT home-build projects reach 39 out of 50 states
- Marine Cpl Justin Gaertner becomes 150<sup>th</sup> home recipient



- Second Annual Homes for the Holidays donates 12 homes to veterans

2013

## BUILDING HIGHLIGHTS AND MILESTONES

### GROUNDBREAKINGS

<u>Army SPC Christopher Ochs</u> Huron Township, MI	Nov. 23, 2013
<u>Marine LCpl Tomy Parker</u> Polson, MT	Nov. 23, 2013
<u>Marine LCpl Brandon Long</u> St. Augustine, FL	Dec. 1, 2013
<u>Marine Cpl Jacob Romo</u> Somerville, TN	Jan. 4, 2014
<u>Marine Sgt Robert Bruce</u> Mesa, AZ	Jan. 25, 2014
<u>Marine Cpl Michael Fox</u> McLendon Chisholm, TX	Jan. 25, 2014
<u>Marine Cpl Jonathan Schumacher</u> Murrieta, CA	Feb. 28, 2014
<u>Marine Cpl Justin Crabbe</u> Yucaipa, CA	March 8, 2014
<u>Marine Sgt Julian Torres</u> Fallbrook, CA	March 9, 2014
<u>Marine Cpl Joshua Hotaling</u> Loomis, CA	April 5, 2014
<u>Marine Sgt Joshua Sweeney</u> Hillsboro, OR	April 5, 2014

### VOLUNTEER DAYS

<u>Army SSG Alex Dillmann</u> Tampa, FL	Nov. 23, 2013
<u>Army SSG Luke Murphy</u> Tallahassee, FL	Dec. 7, 2013
<u>Marine Sgt Jordan Maynard</u> Cottonwood, AZ	Jan. 11, 2014



*The Stinson family arrives by sleigh to their Key Ceremony on Dec. 13, 2013.*

### KEY CEREMONIES

<u>Army SGT Odin Ayala</u> El Cajon, CA*	Dec. 2, 2013
<u>Marine Cpl Travis Greene</u> El Cajon, CA*	Dec. 2, 2013
<u>Army SPC Justin Perez-Gorda</u> Dripping Springs, TX*	Dec. 3, 2013
<u>Army SSG Wallace Fanene</u> Temecula, CA*	Dec. 4, 2013
<u>Marine Cpl Justin Gaertner</u> Lutz, FL*	Dec. 4, 2013
<u>Army SSG Alex Dillmann</u> Tampa, FL*	Dec. 5, 2013
<u>Army CPL Johnathan Jackson</u> York County, VA*	Dec. 6, 2013
<u>Marine Cpl James "Michael" Boucher</u> Hawkinsville, GA*	Dec. 7, 2013
<u>Army SGT Brian Jergens</u> Hollister, CA*	Dec. 12, 2013
<u>Marine Sgt Zachary Stinson</u> Chambersburg, PA*	Dec. 13, 2013
<u>Army SGT Aaron Jolly</u> Eaton Rapids, MI*	Dec. 14, 2013
<u>Marine Cpl Kevin Dubois</u> Burrillville, RI*	Dec. 21, 2013
<u>Marine Cpl Ammon Lang</u> Port Angeles, WA	Jan. 18, 2014
<u>Marine Sgt Jordan Maynard</u> Cottonwood, AZ	Feb. 1, 2014
<u>Army SPC Brett Bondurant</u> Lawrenceburg, IN	Feb. 8, 2014
<u>Army SGT Matthew Parker</u> Elizabeth, CO	Feb. 8, 2014
<u>Marine Cpl Jeffrey Kessler</u> Rising Sun, MD	Feb. 15, 2014
<u>Army SSG Luke Murphy</u> Tallahassee, FL	Feb. 22, 2014
<u>Marine Sgt Gabriel Martinez</u> Parker, CO	March 8, 2014
<u>Marine Cpl David Noblit</u> Elysburg, PA	March 29, 2014
<u>Marine Cpl Brandon Rumbaugh</u> Uniontown, PA	April 26, 2014

\* Homes for the Holidays 2013 event

## 2014

- HFOT celebrates its tenth year of life-changing work



- HFOT builds its 164<sup>th</sup> home for Marine Cpl Jeffrey Kessler

# HAPPY 10TH ANNIVERSARY!

## Past Home Recipients Reflect on HFOT

Army CPL Jeffery Williams, Huntsville, AL

I was introduced to the HFOT family in 2009 when my social worker told me about the organization. I then received my home in 2011. The home has done so much for my morale. It has given me so much more independence that I had lost because of my injury. The home just makes me forget I'm in a wheelchair because it was built to accommodate one. My HFOT home is one of the greatest blessings I've ever received.

The HFOT staff is family in my eyes and really care about us veterans. I enjoy when they give me the opportunity to speak at Groundbreaking Ceremonies for other injured warriors. It has given me so much confidence and joy to live a happy productive life. I just hope I can make a difference in someone else's life like these great people did for me. God bless HFOT and God bless America.



Jeffery Williams, (L) addresses attendees at the Groundbreaking for Marine Cpl David Noblit (R).



Tim and Jackie Johannsen and their son Oliver.

Army SGT Tim Johannsen, Elizabeth, CO

Having our home has done so many things for me. Most importantly is the independence I have gained because I can roam the house in my wheelchair and not have to worry about not fitting through a door way or into a bathroom. I can come and go and not have to worry about stairs. Also, it has helped us financially. My family and I don't have to worry about a mortgage, which allows us to focus on the more important things in life. We will always be thankful to Homes for Our Troops for giving us our home.

Army SFC Jake Keeslar, Fallbrook, CA

It is truly difficult for us to put into words the impact that this house has had on our lives. We have lived here for a little over two years and almost daily we send words of gratitude to Homes for our Troops for making this happen. Our focus now is on what we can create with the new life we've been given, how we can be in service to others and what projects we will undertake as we turn this house into a home. To be able to focus on these things instead of worrying is one of the biggest gifts that you have given us. Thank you does not even begin to cover it!



Jake and Vanessa Keeslar, and "Lucy."

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