



Foundations

A Newsletter from Homes For Our Troops | www.hfotusa.org | NOVEMBER 2021



Overcoming the Odds

Home Recipient
Army SPC Luis Puertas
Photo: Akifumi Ishikawa /
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A Letter from the Chairman of the Board

Dear HFOT Supporters,

Homes For Our Troops has worked tirelessly since 2004 to build over 320 homes for our severely injured post-9/11 Veterans so they can live their lives safely and independently.

However, there are still more than 1,000 severely injured Veterans who qualify for our program. Some of these Veterans were injured over 15 years ago but chose to cope with their injuries in traditional housing. Over the years, their conditions have worsened as they age and continue living in non-adapted homes, often injuring themselves further. Homes For Our Troops is committed to ensuring that every Veteran who qualifies for one of our homes receives one. Because of the support of great Patriots like you, I know we will fulfill this mission.

As we observe Veterans Day this month, I want to thank you for honoring the service and sacrifice of our brave men and women in uniform every day with your commitment to our mission. One of the greatest gifts YOU give these extraordinary Americans is restoring their freedom and independence. It is truly remarkable seeing what these severely injured Veterans accomplish when they receive their adapted homes. Once the barriers of traditional housing are removed, they can focus on their future and pursue lifelong goals.

This newsletter highlights how your commitment to our mission is life-changing. In this issue, we share with you how Army Sergeant Robert Barber and Army Private First Class Heather Trujillo can run small businesses from the comfort of their homes. You will also read about Army Specialist Luis Puertas and Marine Corporal Ray Hennagir competing in Tokyo at the 2020 Paralympic Games.

We hope you celebrate our Veterans' successes with us. It is your generosity that fuels our organization and keeps our momentum going. This past year our organization faced some challenges, most notably the substantial increase in the price of lumber and other materials, which drove up our construction costs. Your dedication to our mission of Building Homes and Rebuilding Lives helped us persevere and continue to bring more deserving Veterans into HFOT homes.

Thank you again for keeping our cause at Homes For Our Troops close to your heart and never forgetting the service and sacrifice these great Americans made on behalf of you and I.

Sincerely,

Dick Cody

General Richard A Cody, USA (Ret.)
Chairman, Homes For Our Troops



November 2021

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5th ANNUAL HOMES FOR OUR TROOPS VETERANS DAY 2021



Hosted by Jake Tapper, George Clooney, Wynonna Judd, Don Cheadle, and Mindy Kaling

Save the Date!
November 4-14
CELEBRITY AUCTION

HOMES FOR OUR TROOPS
eBay FOR CHARITY



A History of Excellence

HFOT has been evaluated as one of America's Top Rated Veterans and Military Charities.

Coming into FOCUS



Army Specialist Johnny Nguyen's love for photography first started when his uncle gave him an old camera that was collecting dust in a closet. "I snapped a few pictures and realized it opened up a whole new world for me," he says.

The hobby became an outlet for Johnny during his recovery after losing his left leg in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast while serving in Iraq. He realized if he wanted to take good pictures, he had to venture to new places. "It forced me to explore my city and discover areas I would not have found otherwise," he says. "It got me off the couch and out of my shell."

Johnny has expanded his interests to include aerial photography and videos. He especially enjoys capturing the beauty of people, places, and things. "When it comes to taking photos of people, it's so rewarding to see this newfound confidence in a person when they first see themselves framed in a gorgeous way they haven't seen before."

Johnny's goal is to continue producing great photos and videos for friends and family while exploring the world around him. He says receiving a specially adapted custom Homes For Our Troops home will help him with this endeavor. In his current home, Johnny has limited space because



Army Specialist Johnny Nguyen (far left) found a passion for photography during his recovery.

the hallways are too narrow and can barely accommodate his wheelchair. Additionally, coping with the challenges of a non-accessible home has taken a toll on Johnny mentally and physically. "Having a place of my own where I can edit in peace and focus on my work would be a huge blessing. It would be a place to put all my energy toward this, and I feel like my creativity would go unhindered," he says.

Johnny says he's grateful to everyone who will contribute to the building of his HFOT home. "You are changing lives for the better and giving a lot of us that second chance we need. It's a new, solid foundation for us to rebuild ourselves for the better, and realize that we are more than the missing limbs or damaged souls. It's a constant reminder that there are a lot of people who still care."



Soaking in Joy and Comfort

Army Private First Class Heather Trujillo's Homes For Our Troops home enables her to make homemade products that help others.

When her daughter was having trouble finding soap products that didn't aggravate her skin condition, Heather was determined to find a solution. She learned many soap products are detergent, which can irritate sensitive skin, and that natural soap is a process of turning fats and oils into glycerin. By making soap, one can control how much fat and oil is left behind. Heather started making her own soap and found a combination that moisturizes while protecting the skin. The products not only helped her daughter but others with conditions such as psoriasis and eczema. "Most people that I gave it to loved it and wanted more bars. It gave me the idea to start selling it," she said.

Having a fully accessible HFOT home makes it much easier for Heather to expand her craft. After sustaining a spinal cord injury while serving in Afghanistan in 2006, she spent many years using a wheelchair and now walks with the assistance of a cane. "The process of making soap is extremely technical and takes a bit of maneuvering to do with my injuries," she says. "But my kitchen and home are set up so I can reach everything, regardless of how my injuries are doing."

Heather says she aspires to turn her soap-making hobby into a business. "I want to live a life where I can do something I love, and it also helps people. The last few years have taught me that finding peace and joy is what matters, and I hope this endeavor grants these things."

Since receiving her home, Heather's accomplishments have gone beyond soap making. She recently graduated summa cum laude with her bachelor's degree in criminal justice, and she and her newlywed husband are trying to expand their family. "My home gave me hope and the ability to chase the future with a safe place to land when I push it too far," she says.



Army PFC Heather Trujillo making soap in her HFOT home.

Before receiving her home in 2018, Heather says her injuries made her lose sight of her impact in the world, but the generosity from HFOT's donors and supporters gave her the motivation to find her purpose. "My injury beat me down, and then a few amazing people reached into my darkness. Since that happened, I have become the kind of woman I could be proud of. Not defined by the pain or conditions, defined by my joy, my hope, and the absolute certainty that I must be the kind of person worth this gift. This home is no small thing; your contribution allows people to heal and redefine themselves outside of the boundaries of their new reality."

To view and purchase Heather's soap products visit <https://www.etsy.com/shop/JacksBeerSoap>.



Army SGT Robert Barber with his newborn daughter.

The Business of Beans



Robert Barber's HFOT home provides more than freedom and independence – it also enables him to brew a business.

Robert owns and operates POG Coffee Roasters from his home. While deployed, Robert took comfort making different kinds of coffee, often ordering specialty beans and making cups of "joe" with his French press for his teammates and himself. After losing his left leg while serving in Afghanistan, Robert returned home seeking a new hobby. He realized there was a market for

of Agriculture. "If I have an issue with prosthetics on a particular day, I can always go back to my wheelchair and still be able to get around the home," he says. "Many people think that because you're a good walker, you use your prosthetics all the time. But the reality is a wheelchair is still a necessity at times."

Robert says the goal for his company is to build a big enough customer base to give back to other local Veteran groups. Without HFOT's supporters, he says, he would not be where he is today. In addition to creating a business, Robert has also expanded his family. He welcomed his fourth child in July 2021. "I am in a healthy place right now and it took a lot of work to get there. Having an adapted home is just one of the many things that enabled me to get to that point in life after a traumatic injury."



Learn more about Robert's company at <https://pogcoffeeroasters.com/>

Veteran-owned local businesses, and teamed up with some law enforcement friends to create the company.

Robert credits his HFOT home as being one the reasons he was able to pursue a coffee business. He converted his garage into his company's roasting facility, and obtained certification by South Carolina's Department



Hole-in-one for Fundraising

Hellen Keller once said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." At Homes For Our Troops, we are honored and privileged to work with thousands of Americans who exemplify Miss Keller's statement by joining forces with us to support our deserving Veterans. We are grateful for all the time, energy, and effort people spend to help us advance our mission.

In some instances, our fundraisers are also HFOT Veterans. The Mulligans For Military Golf Tournament celebrated its 11th year on Aug. 30, 2021, and is a shining example of the selflessness of our Veterans. This Pay It Forward tournament takes place in Colorado and is organized by HFOT home recipient Army Sergeant Tim "TJ" Johannsen. TJ received his home on March 26, 2011, and has been giving back to HFOT with this tournament and speaking on behalf of the organization nationwide ever since.

Before joining the Army, TJ developed a love of skateboarding. However, after losing both legs while serving in Iraq, TJ was introduced to golf while recovering at Walter Reed Medical Center, and he fell in love with the challenges of the sport.

Upon receiving his HFOT home in Colorado, TJ focused on his golf game. Being incredibly grateful for the support he received, TJ wanted to do something to give back. The home gives him more independence and comfort and has enabled him and his wife Jackie to be stay-at-home parents for their two boys. TJ joined forces with Dan McGrath from Spring Valley Golf Club to create a fundraising event, and the incredible Mulligans For Military Golf Tournament was born. Spring Valley soon became more than a place for TJ to swing clubs; it became part of his family. "I never had a place to go before Spring Valley. It is like the TV show Cheers -- everyone knows your name, and they are kind," TJ says.

Spring Valley Golf Club is more than kind, they are extremely generous and have been a major sponsor of this tournament since its inception. Director of Golf, Spencer Smith, who helps organize this event, shares, "It is amazing to see the change in people's lives, like TJ, from living in an HFOT home. We are proud to be a part of something so great."

A huge portion of the success of this golf tournament is from the generosity of the owners and staff at Spring Valley. Everyone at this golf club plays a role in the accomplishments of this event, including award winning chef, Fabian Anderson, who works tirelessly to ensure all the golfers and volunteers are taken care of throughout the day.

TJ and his crew are excited to continue their tradition of golf, fundraising, and helping to advance HFOT's mission for years to come. To date, they have raised a total of \$437,708, which includes \$41,778 from their most recent tournament in August. This event is a grassroots operation, and the dedication and commitment of the sponsors, golfers, and volunteers is humbling. Their passion and drive to support Colorado Veterans go hand-in-hand with TJ's thoughts. "Somebody raised money for me. Other men and women who come after me deserve the same opportunity."



TJ Johannsen



From left: Ken Mergl, Jeremy Beinert, TJ Johannsen, and Jared Hadden at The Mulligans For Military Golf Tournament.

If you would like to become involved with this tournament, host your own fundraising event, or learn more about our mission, please contact: ifundraising@hfotusa.org

MI Windows and Doors (MIWD) extends partnership for another three years!

MI Windows and Doors (MIWD) has been a devoted National Partner and Official Supplier of windows for the HFOT mission since 2015. We are excited to announce the continuation of this valuable partnership for another three years.

MIWD provides HFOT with ADA compliant, energy efficient, sliding windows that feature a locking mechanism easily accessible from a wheelchair. The window design is crucial for HFOT Veterans to be able to open and close their windows comfortably.

MIWD's support goes beyond providing products. The company annually participates in the HFOT Golf Classic, and invites HFOT Veterans to join the MI Foundation Charity Golf Outing in Hershey, Pennsylvania. During the summer of 2020, MIWD pivoted to host a virtual concert with a performance by Jason Derulo that featured their partnership with HFOT.

"Through our MI Charitable Foundation, our team has made it a priority to support our Veterans. The Homes For Our Troops mission to build and donate specially adapted custom homes for severely injured post-9/11 Veterans is an ideal way to commemorate our selfless servicemen and women who sacrificed so much to provide us the freedoms we enjoy every day," says MI CEO Matt DeSoto.



Board Member Spotlight:

SMA (USA, Retired) Kenneth O. Preston



Sergeant Major of the Army (Retired) Kenneth O. Preston served as the 13th Sergeant Major of the Army from January 15, 2004 to March 1, 2011. He retired as the longest serving Sergeant Major of the Army with more than seven years in the position.

SMA (Retired) Preston is a native of Mount Savage, Maryland. He entered the Army on June 30, 1975. Throughout his 36-year career, he served in every enlisted leadership position from cavalry scout and tank commander, to his final position as Sergeant Major of the Army. Other assignments he held as a command sergeant major were with the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division; 3rd "Grey Wolf" Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division; 1st Armored Division in Bad Kreuznach, Germany; and V Corps in Heidelberg, Germany.

SMA Preston joined the HFOT Board of Directors in 2011 and served as the organization's President/CEO from February 2012 to February 2013.

Why is HFOT's mission important to you?

Helping our most seriously injured Veterans is a very personal effort for me. Many of these Veterans I served with at posts, camps, and stations all over the world and in combat. This group of seriously injured men and women – those who spend all or part of their lives every day in a wheelchair due to amputation, paralysis, or limb salvage – these are the Veterans who need the greatest support. When I speak to supporters, I tell them they can make a difference in the quality of life for these Veterans and their families. The large majority are young with families, and now medically retired. One of the greatest contributions the American public can make to this group of military Veterans is to take a mortgage or a rental payment off the table and provide a home for them and their family designed for total accessibility, so they are not isolated to one or two rooms. A home where they can go into a child's nursery, access the kitchen to heat a baby bottle, or fix a meal. This type of home reintegrates the Veteran back into their family where they can contribute as a parent or spouse. This type of accessibility enables most of our Veterans to be far more independent, and not totally dependent on a full-time care provider. This contribution to our most severely injured Veterans sets the stage for them and their families to move forward with the next chapter of their lives.

How did you find out about the organization?

When I was retiring from the Army in 2011, my plans were to return back to the family farm, look after mom, dad and my father-in-law, and get the farm up and running again. The Chairman of the Board, GEN (Ret) Dick Cody called and asked me to join the board. As I learned more about the organization, I knew this was an effort I wanted to be a part of, to make a difference in the lives of these seriously injured Veterans and their families.

What would you say to encourage others to get involved with HFOT's mission?

HFOT is one of those special organizations that support our most severely injured Veterans and their families with the greatest need, an adapted home. The homes we build provide freedom and accessibility for these injured Veterans which promotes reintegration back into their lives as a husband or wife, a father, or mother. This freedom has opened the doors of opportunity for many of our Veterans and spouses to return to school and ultimately pursue a future career of their own. Sixty-five percent of the donations needed to build each of our homes comes from individuals and foundations.

What has been your most memorable moment with the organization?

Every time you present the keys of a new home to a Veteran and their family, there is an overwhelming sense of pride as you tell them this home is a gift from the American people for their service and sacrifice. One of my favorite presentations was Staff Sergeant Alex Dillman and his wife Holly. Alex was in the Tampa VA hospital where he had just finished one of many surgeries when we held a Veteran conference and he was unable to travel. His wife Holly attended the three-day conference, where she was overwhelmed with the professionalism and love of the staff, and the quality of the homes we were building. She took all of this information back to Alex. HFOT could not make a final decision to build them a home without first interviewing and talking with Alex face-to-face. Within two weeks, I had the opportunity to do a Key Ceremony in Florida for a young Marine, and arranged to meet with Alex in his hospital room. Sitting there next to his hospital bed, we talked about his service in the Army as an Infantry Soldier and squad leader, how he was seriously injured, and his dreams for a family with Holly. A year later I had the opportunity to present Alex the keys to his new home. [Alex and Holly now have a five year old son]

How does our organization differ from other charities you've worked with in the past?

The gift HFOT provides for our Veterans is tangible; it is a gift that is designed to last a lifetime. This home goes far beyond providing a place to live, as we focus on rebuilding the lives of these Veterans so they and their families can move forward with the next chapter in their lives. There are very few organizations that make this kind of contribution and commitment to our most severely injured Veterans. The second thing that sets HFOT apart from others is its fiscal responsibility to the donors, the American people. Having a 4-star rating with Charity Navigator and an A rating with Charity Watch reflect the focus of the organization to fund our programs while minimizing fundraising and administrative costs.

What's the biggest challenge for HFOT and what steps is the Board taking to meet / accomplish its mission despite that challenge?

Keeping fundraising and administrative costs low has always been a key focus for the Board. The inherent responsibility that comes with this commitment is for the Board to reach out and educate potential donors about HFOT in every possible way. Donations can come in many forms, from gifts in kind, large monetary commitments from industry, to creating opportunities to fundraise or bring awareness to our mission.

Marine Corporal Raymond D. Hennagir III
Photo: Lexi Branta Coon
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Marine Corporal
Raymond Hennagir
(center) celebrates a
win with his wheelchair
rugby teammates
during the 2020
Paralympic Games.



Representing the Red, White, and Blue



Army SPC Luis Puertas
Photo: Akifumi Ishikawa / Courtesy of
Stars and Stripes, All Rights Reserved

Two Homes For Our Troops Veterans recently had the opportunity to represent their country again – this time in an athletic venue instead of the battlefield. HFOT home recipient Army Specialist Luis Puertas and future HFOT home recipient Marine Corporal Raymond Hennagir traveled to Tokyo in August 2021 to compete in the 2020 Paralympic Games.

Luis, who received his HFOT home in 2011, came in fourth in the 200m sprint for track and field on Sept. 3. He lost both legs while serving in Iraq in 2006, and started running the following year. *"I wanted to recover, get out of the hospital, and get on with my life. Adaptive sports gave me the initial push I needed to get my engine rolling,"* he says.

Luis says his HFOT home gave him the economic stability and mental peace needed to focus on his training. *"My home is the reason I made it to the Tokyo Paralympic Games. It is a beautiful place where I get to give my daughter childhood memories forever,"* he says. *"I thank every single person that's by HFOT's side and mine. Our Veterans are thriving in their homes and achieving incredible accomplishments because of generous American Patriots."*

Ray Hennagir and the U.S. Wheelchair Rugby Team took the silver medal on Saturday, Aug. 29, after a hard-fought match with Great Britain.

After losing both legs while serving in Iraq in 2007, Raymond was encouraged to play wheelchair basketball by one of his recreational therapists at Walter Reed. He switched over to wheelchair rugby because he was drawn to the physicality of the sport, and realized he could compete at the highest level.

Ray says playing rugby and basketball has helped him during his recovery. *"It's given me something to look forward to and gets me out of my room,"* he says.

When he first started playing sports after his injury, Raymond never even imagined he'd make it to the Paralympics. *"It's been a long journey. When I first started playing, I thought even just making it to the Paralympics would be cool. Bringing home a medal is just the icing on the cake,"* he says.

HFOT will be building Raymond's home in Texas. He says having a fully adapted environment will enable him to focus on his future goals, which include winning world championships with his wheelchair basketball and rugby teams. In his current home, the bathroom is not wheelchair accessible which makes everyday tasks difficult. *"Having an accessible home is going to be awesome. It will make normal tasks, like taking a shower, easier,"* he says.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR...

... and **HELP US** reach our goal of
\$500,000
 to *Build Homes and Rebuild Lives*
 for injured Veterans.



Photo by: Jason Winkeler - Courtesy of Wayfair

This year we have the special opportunity of a challenge match to potentially raise \$1 million dollars total, but only when we reach our \$500,000 goal! Your donation could help us achieve double the impact with an additional \$500,000 generously donated from The Andresen Family Foundation.



GIVING AN IRA

Making a donation through your IRA is a great way to support HFOT and give the life-changing gift of a custom home to an HFOT Veteran.

Are you 70 ½ or older? If so, you can make a gift from your IRA of up to \$100,000 to HFOT.

In doing so, you are helping to further the work and mission of HFOT.

Benefits of giving through an IRA include:*

- Reduce your taxable income, even if you do not itemize deductions
- Give a gift that is not subject to the deduction limits on charitable gifts
- Depending on your personal financial situation, you may also satisfy your required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year

To begin the process, contact your IRA Plan Administrator.

For more information, contact Suzanne Shaheen, Planned Giving Officer at **508-823-3300 ext. 241** or sshaheen@hfotusa.org

*HFOT recommends you seek the guidance of a professional advisor to assist you in making an informed decision. Any information provided by Homes For Our Troops is not meant as a substitute for financial advice. Please note that you cannot receive any goods or services in exchange for your IRA rollover gift.

Did you know that you can donate stocks or other securities?

This is a great way to support Homes For Our Troops and the Veterans we serve, with the added bonus of potential tax savings!*

For more information about donating stock, please contact Suzanne Shaheen at:
508-823-3300 ext. 241 or
sshaheen@hfotusa.org

HFOT recommends you seek the guidance of a professional advisor, to assist you on making an informed decision. Any information provided by Homes For Our Troops is not meant as a substitute for financial advice.