



# Foundations

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

## A FEW STEPS CLOSER TO HOME



Marine Gunnery Sergeant Brian Meyer makes his way to the Groundbreaking Ceremony for his new home in Fallbrook, CA last August.

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends of HFOT,

This Veterans Day, I hope you take the opportunity to reflect on the many liberties you and your families possess because of the thousands of brave men and women who have served honorably in the military during times of war and peace.

At Homes for Our Troops, every day is truly Veterans Day. We believe no other charitable organization does more to honor the sacrifices made by our nation's Veterans than ours by Building Homes and Rebuilding Lives. This is not a boastful claim we make, but one we proudly state in celebration of the caring, compassionate and patriotic volunteers, sponsors and donors - such as you - who unselfishly support our important work of helping severely injured Veterans nationwide.

In this issue of our Foundations newsletter, we salute a few of those special contributors, who have chosen to donate monthly to our cause through our Operation Lasting Support monthly giving program. As you read their compelling stories, I ask you to consider making this Veterans Day the time you pledge to do the same.

On the following pages you'll witness how Homes for Our Troops is turning your donations into dreams for our country's most severely injured Veterans through the gift of a specially adapted home. You'll meet one of our injured Heroes, Marine Corporal Jacob Romo and his wife Michelle, both loving and dedicated parents who are homeschooling their children in Tennessee. They are scheduled to receive their new home on December 6, 2014 as part of our Homes for the Holidays celebration. Because of your past support, Jacob and Michelle will now be able to share their knowledge, love and lifelong memories with their children in the comfort of a safe and mortgage-free home-their forever home.

You'll also read Roxann Breece's incredible firsthand account of the day her Hero and husband Jeremy was wounded in battle, and learn about their journey of recovery together. As future HFOT home recipients, there is much hope on the horizon for the Breece family.

It is only through the financial commitment of our supporters over the years that we can build these homes. Each month we are humbled to see the number of our constituents grow, many of whom have no direct links to the military, but share the same moral obligation as we do: to restore freedom and independence to those Service Members who have sacrificed for ours. We are also grateful for you sharing our mission with others, whether it's by bringing friends or family to an HFOT event, forwarding an email or direct link to donate on our website, or sharing one of our posts on social media.

We're happy to provide a snapshot of our growth and successes so far this year, and give you a glimpse of what's ahead for our organization in 2015. There's much work to be done for the approximately 1,700 severely injured Veterans nationwide still in need of specially adapted homes, but I am confident that with your continued commitment to Homes for Our Troops, together we can indeed complete this crucial mission.

On behalf of the hundreds of Veterans and families you have helped by donating to Homes for Our Troops, I thank you for making a difference in their lives this Veterans Day, and every day. Happy Holidays and All the Best for 2015.

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.



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# Homes for Our Troops

Building Homes, Rebuilding Lives

## Our Mission

Homes for Our Troops (HFOT) is a privately funded 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization building specially adapted homes nationwide for the most severely injured Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Most of these Veterans are multiple amputees, paraplegic, quadriplegic or have suffered severe traumatic brain injury (TBI). Our homes are provided mortgage-free to the Veterans we serve, restoring some of the freedom and independence our Veterans sacrificed defending ours, and enabling them to focus on their family, recovery, and rebuilding their Lives.

## Our Homes

Our homes have over 155 special adaptations that go beyond ADA compliance, including widened doorways, automatic doors, roll-under sinks and cooktops, lowered counters and pull-down shelving, all designed to help the Veteran live independently. Depending on the severity of the Veteran's injuries, such as spinal cord injury and/or paralysis, the home may also include a special lift system, removing much of the burden of care for the Veteran's caregiver/spouse and family.

## Our Projects

As of September 30, 2014 HFOT has built 168 specially adapted homes nationwide. There are currently 54 Veterans on our active project list.



## HFOT Welcomes

### Three New Members to Board of Directors

*HFOT is pleased to announce the following new members to its Board of Directors effective Oct. 1, 2014.*



**Adam Kisielewski**

**Marine Sgt (Ret.) Adam Kisielewski** served with the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines, Golf Company as an infantry squad leader. In August 2005, Kisielewski was severely injured in an improvised explosive device blast, resulting in the amputation of his left arm and his right leg, and extensive injuries to his left leg, ears and stomach.

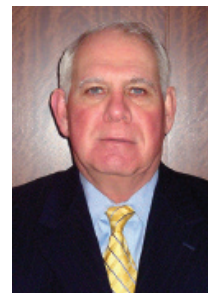
Kisielewski graduated summa cum laude from Mount St. Mary's University recently with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and theology, and is pursuing a Juris Doctorate at Georgetown University. He and his wife Carrie, and son Evan, live in Frederick, Md., in the home awarded to him by Homes for Our Troops in 2011.

**Gen (Ret) John Allen (USMC)** is a 1976 graduate of the United States Naval Academy, and recently retired from the United States Marine Corps after more than 37 years of distinguished service. Commanding from the platoon through theater level, his final assignment was as the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and US Forces – Afghanistan, where he oversaw all NATO and US operations in Afghanistan. He most recently was appointed as the US Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL.

**Ms. Valerie Baldwin** brings a wealth of experience to our Board, including service as the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Financial Management and Comptroller). She has also served as a staff assistant for the US House of Representatives, and is currently serving on the Homeland Security Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee.

## Other Board News

Homes for Our Troops would like to publicly acknowledge **Paul E. Keane** ( Director 2010-2014) and **Jennifer Freitas** (Treasurer 2006-2014) for their dedication and excellence while serving the organization as board members. Through their leadership and guidance, Homes for Our Troops was able to aggressively advance its mission to help more of our nation's severely injured Veterans receive the specially adapted homes they need to help them rebuild their lives. On behalf of our staff, donors, supporters, and the Veterans we are privileged to serve, we thank you for your years of service to Homes for Our Troops, and wish you much success in the years to come!



**Paul E. Keane**



**Jennifer Freitas**

# A NEW HOME FOR LEARNING

The new specially adapted home that retired Marine Cpl Jacob Romo will soon receive is not only going to be a place for him to spend time with his children, it will also serve as a venue for learning.

Jacob and his wife Michelle have been homeschooling their children ever since their oldest, Liam was a toddler. "It started that early simply because he was interested," says Jacob. "We never pushed him or held him to a particular standard, he just loves to learn."

Jacob says that Liam, now 5, is currently at a third grade reading level and a second grade level for math. Jacob recently started teaching his three-year-old son Derren too. Each day, Jacob teaches his sons topics such as Bible knowledge, history and science. For physical education the boys are both formally training in traditional martial arts – Jacob's background and specialty. Liam is also taking ballet and tap dance at the studio where his mom Michelle teaches.



*Jacob and Michelle Romo with "Sergeant."*

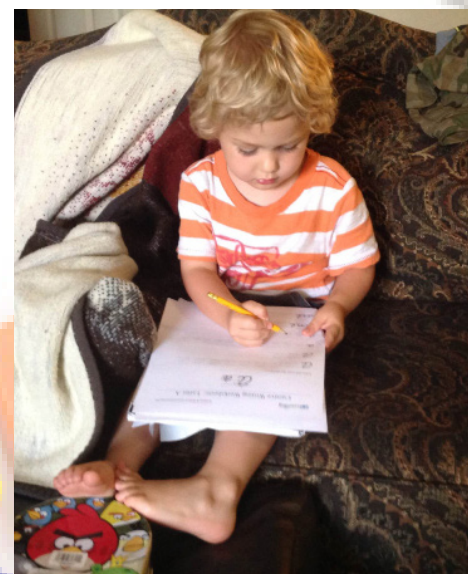
Once the family moves into their home, Jacob and Michelle plan to have an entire room or more devoted to educating their children. They plan to get desks, bookshelves, charts, writing boards and a science lab. "This is actually perhaps the most exciting aspect of getting our house for me," says Jacob. "This is something we just cannot do while renting and it limits what we can do to provide for our children's education."

He says he'll be able to teach his sons activities in the kitchen and outdoors so they can learn more about science and nature as well as practical tasks like cooking. "Having the space and ability to access everything is very important and our HFOT home will provide these things," he says.

*The Romo family will receive their new specially adapted home in Somerville, Tennessee with a Key Ceremony on Dec. 6, as part of HFOT's Homes for the Holidays celebration.*

Jacob says he understands homeschooling isn't for everyone, that it takes a lot of time, patience and commitment. "We feel that we have the capability to give our children the education we feel they should have," he says. One of the challenges, Jacob says, is that the parent is solely responsible for organizing, screening and presenting the material. However, there are resources available to assist.

Jacob's injuries pose challenges to homeschooling in their current home. He lost both his legs during his first deployment to an improvised explosive device (IED) blast in Afghanistan in February 2011. Currently, he has to navigate through cramped furniture, climb over things to get to certain books, or sit on a desk to observe his son writing an assignment.



*Making learning a family affair: The Romos homeschool both sons Liam (left) and Derren (right).*



**L-3**

Since 2012, L-3 Communications has donated a total of \$1 million dollars in support of the Homes for Our Troops mission. L-3's pledge has directly impacted severely injured Veterans nationwide by helping them receive mortgage-free specially adapted homes. Beyond this financial commitment, L-3 continues to go above and beyond when possible for HFOT Veterans by coordinating funds for housewarming gifts for them.

**Whirlpool**



It has been a full year since Whirlpool Corporation became the Official Supplier of major appliances for the Homes for Our Troops mission. By the end of 2014, nearly 30 Veterans will have the Whirlpool appliance package in their homes. Other brands under the Whirlpool Corporation are giving back as well; KitchenAid is supplying countertop appliances and Gladiator is supplying garage storage solutions as housewarming gifts.

Whirlpool Corporation is also offering a Friends and Family discount to HFOT supporters that gives back five percent of sales to support the HFOT mission. Visit [whirlpoolinsidepass.com](http://whirlpoolinsidepass.com) and enter group code HFT2A3913 to sign up and start saving while supporting the HFOT mission.

**Coldwell Banker**



On March 6, 2014 Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerages held their 2014 *Spirit of Home Awards* Celebration at the Four Seasons Hotel in Boston. HFOT President Timothy McHale and HFOT home recipient, Adam Kisielewski, accepted the *Spirit of Home Award* and spoke about HFOT's mission to attendees. The Gala raised \$110,000 for the specially adapted home project underway for SSG Matthew DeWitt in New Hampshire. Representatives from Coldwell Banker then visited HFOT's office in Taunton, Mass. to deliver the check at a luncheon.



Representatives from Coldwell Banker present a check to HFOT at a luncheon on Sept. 16, 2014. Left to right: Jim Wells, Deborah Versackas, Todd Lamothe, Erminio Grasso, Pat Villani, HFOT Veteran Adam Kisielewski, HFOT President Tim McHale and HFOT Executive Director Bill Ivey.

# My Husband, MY HERO

My husband, Staff Sergeant Jeremy Breece, is a True American Hero. In 2008, Jeremy and I thought it would be best that I separate from the Air Force because of two reasons. One being I was pregnant and two, Jeremy had orders to Germany for three years with the U.S. Army. We then moved to Germany.

During the summer of 2009, Jeremy received the Expert Infantry Badge (EIB). Right after receiving his EIB, he had an opportunity to complete a dream of his and that was becoming a sniper. At age 32, Jeremy went to sniper school with other friends and Soldiers that were almost 10 years younger than him. The school trains soldiers in marksmanship, sniper equipment and tactics, collection of battlefield intelligence, stalking and other sniper related skills. In July of 2009, Jeremy was one of the few who made it through and graduated. He then deployed to Afghanistan in June of 2010. Although it was very hard for all of us to see him leave for a year, we supported him 100 percent.

Two weeks before Jeremy was due to come home from Afghanistan, on April 21, 2011, I received a phone call that changed our lives. As I said "Hello" a lieutenant colonel was on the other line informing me that my husband was in the hospital due to an injury.



**Roxann Breece, with her husband Jeremy and their son Seth. A new home adapted to Jeremy's needs will be built in Texas thanks to Homes for Our Troops.**

Jeremy then got on the phone to tell me that he had stepped on an IED pressure plate and had lost both legs. At that moment, I broke out in tears and hoped that I was dreaming. While my husband was laying in the hospital in Afghanistan, his exact words to me were, "Baby, it's okay. I'm still alive, it's okay."

I felt so selfish to be so worried and sad rather than being thankful that he was still alive and here he is in pain and trying to calm me down. I have heard nothing but praise about Jeremy when he was in the hospital that day. He hardly stopped to think about him and his pain. He was too worried about the Soldier that was with him, worried about his kids, and worried about his family to think about anything else.

Since the injury in April 2011, Jeremy has had the opportunity to try new things to help boost his morale. He received his SCUBA diving license, learned how to surf and even mono ski! It has definitely taken a long bumpy road to get where we are today but with his motivation and strong will, he is doing anything and everything that he was able to do before.

By accomplishing so much, Jeremy has shown his kids that anything can be done when you set your mind to it. Our 10-year-old had a tough time adapting to the injury but now he sees that everything is okay and wants to be like his dad when he grows up.

***This story was excerpted from an original essay by Roxann Breece, who won the \$25,000 Dickies American Hero of the Year award, in honor of her husband. To support the build project for the Breece family in San Marcos, Texas, visit <http://hfotusa.org/breece>.***



# HOMES *For the Troops*



**Army SSG Matthew DeWitt**  
Hopkinton, NH  
November 8, 2014



**Marine Sgt Joshua Sweeney**  
Hillsboro, OR  
November 11, 2014



**Marine Cpl Jonathan Schumacher**  
Murrieta, CA  
November 14, 2014



**Marine Sgt Robert Bruce**  
Mesa, AZ  
November 15, 2014



**Marine Cpl Justin Crabbe**  
Yucaipa, CA  
November 16, 2014

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*Holidays* 2014



**Marine Cpl Jacob Romo**  
Somerville, TN  
December 6, 2014



**Marine Cpl Carlos Garcia**  
Murrieta, CA  
December 16, 2014



**Marine Cpl Michael Fox**  
McLendon Chisholm, TX  
December 18, 2014



**Army SSG Jason Gibson**  
Marysville, OH  
December 20, 2014



**Marine Sgt Bradley Walker**  
Dandridge, TN  
December 20, 2014



# JOSHUA SWEENEY

receives

## ESPY/PAT TILLMAN AWARD

It's been quite a year for retired Marine Sergeant Joshua Sweeney. He scored the game-winning goal in the gold-medal sled hockey game against Russia, leading Team USA to victory during the 2014 Paralympics in Sochi in March. And this past July he became the first recipient of the Pat Tillman Award for Service in conjunction with the Pat Tillman Foundation and ESPN. Tillman was killed in action in Afghanistan in 2004 after leaving the NFL's Arizona Cardinals to enlist in the Army with his brother Kevin.

Sweeney received the award on July 16 at the 2014 ESPY Awards in Los Angeles. "Receiving this award means a lot. Knowing that I was being compared to someone that I looked up to when I lived in Arizona was very humbling and I was truly honored," he says.

Sweeney lost both legs in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast in October of 2009 while serving in Afghanistan. During his recovery he was introduced to sled hockey and eventually earned his way as a forward on the U.S. Paralympic Sled Hockey Team.

In a statement on the ESPN website, vice president of ESPN Films and Original Entertainment, Connor Schell says, "We are proud to add Pat Tillman's commitment to service and selflessness as another pillar of the ESPYS. Josh Sweeney's dedication and achievements make him a deserving recipient."

Receiving the award came as a shock to Sweeney. "It's not every day you get a call saying that you would be awarded an ESPY and I certainly never had it in mind that I would ever receive one so it's really just the icing on an already amazing cake," he says.



*Sweeney receives Pat Tillman Award at the ESPYS last July from actor Jeff Bridges.*



*Josh Sweeney and USA's 2014 Paralympic Sled Hockey Team celebrating their victory over Russia last March. Sweeney will move into his new HFOT home on Nov. 11.*

The year will be ending on a splendid note for Sweeney too. Homes for Our Troops will be presenting a new home to him and his wife Amber in Hillsboro, Oregon at a Key Ceremony scheduled for Nov. 11, 2014 during HFOT's *Homes for the Holidays* celebration. Sweeney is currently pursuing a degree in engineering and has plans to start a sled hockey program in his community. "My new HFOT home will definitely give me the space to have a training area to be able to work even harder off the ice and help my wife and I raise a family," he says.

More on Josh Sweeney:  
<http://www.hfotusa.org/sweeney>



# First line of *Support*

HFOT's Program Support Department guides  
Veterans every step of the way

**HFOT's Program Support Department: (L-R) Jan Francis, Kylee Adams and Mae Socha.**

As Veterans begin their HFOT journey to receive a new specially adapted home, they have a team of three ready to offer a lending hand. Our Program Support Department guides the Veterans beginning with the land search phase all the way through the build process and after they've moved into their home.

Program Support Supervisor Jan Francis oversees the day-to-day operations and is the primary point of contact for all Veterans from acceptance into the HFOT program through post-delivery of the home. Warranty Specialist Kylee Adams coordinates warranty claims, works with Veterans and contractors on current warranty work and provides home guidance on various questions that arise. Program Support Representative Mae Socha guides the Veterans during the search for land and coordinates the pro bono financial planning support they will receive to prepare them as homeowners.

Jan first learned about HFOT through her credit union in 2008. She held many fundraisers for the organization with her Blue Star Mothers Chapter before coming on board as an employee in 2011.

She says the best part of her role is meeting the Veterans and their families and assisting them through the program process. "I am always humbled by the courage, service and sacrifice of not only the service member, but the wives, moms and dads who support them," she says.

Kylee, who started working for HFOT in 2013, knew from her first phone interview she wanted the job. "I was excited to be a small part of an organization which sees building specially adapted homes for severely injured Veterans as an obligation, not necessarily charity," she says.

Mae also joined the team in 2013, saying she wanted to be part of an organization with a mission she was passionate about. "I love that I am able to work directly with Veterans and their families," she says.

All three say working for HFOT has brought them many great moments. Jan says the most rewarding part for her is setting the Key Ceremony date, the official move-in day. "I know the Veteran has been waiting patiently for the HFOT home to be completed while struggling with barriers that undoubtedly exist in the current home," she says.

"Hearing the excitement and relief in their voice knowing in a very short period of time they will be living in a barrier-free home is a very heart-warming moment for me," she says.

Kylee acknowledges coordinating warranty work can be a bit challenging because she's not physically there at the Veteran's home. But it's always a good feeling when HFOT's Veterans are happy with all of their home's features. "If the Veteran is satisfied with the work and we can mark off a warranty item as completed, that allows the Veteran to move on with rebuilding their life," she says.

Mae says one of the greatest moments on the job was attending her first HFOT Veteran Conference. The conference is the final step of HFOT's application process for Veterans, where they learn details about the build process and meet the HFOT staff. After the conference, Veterans are then notified by the HFOT team about their acceptance. Mae was thrilled to deliver the good news to a deserving Hero. "I was honored to call a Veteran and his wife to accept them into our Program and ask them to be a part of the HFOT family," she says.

## For Some, Reasons for Giving to HFOT

# Hit Close to *Home*

Each month, Homes for Our Troops receives \$25,000 in monthly donations through our Operation Lasting Support (OLS) program. By giving a gift each month, these supporters are enabling Homes for Our Troops to carry out its important mission of giving back freedom and independence to our severely injured Veterans, through the gift of a mortgage-free, specially adapted home. No matter how or why our donors are drawn to our special mission, one thing is for sure; they are all committed to helping severely injured Veterans rebuild their lives after war. Read about some of our special contributors and their reasons below.

### Mike and Donna Bush, AZ

Four years ago, Mike and Donna Bush received news that their son, Danny, was injured in an accident on base just before his scheduled deployment to Iraq, leaving him paralyzed from the chest down. They worried how Danny would deal with the obstacles ahead. He would be wheelchair bound, and life would be difficult. While the emotional support and physical care Danny received from the Army was encouraging, he made little progress during the three months in the hospital.

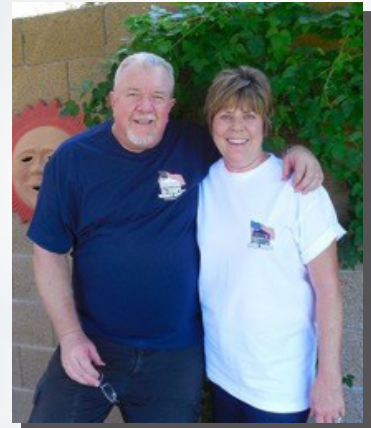
With Danny's impending release from the hospital, Mike and Donna had to prepare for his return home. It was critical to Danny's care that special modifications be made to the bathroom and his bedroom. Even after spending \$40,000 in renovations, they knew he would still face challenges in the rest of the home. But it was all they could afford. The financial strain made Mike and Donna wonder how the estimated 1,700 other severely injured Service Members

were able to manage. Then they saw a news story about Homes for Our Troops. Understanding the challenges, they knew they had to help.

"No matter what we gave, it wouldn't be enough" thought Donna and Mike. So they became Charter Members of Homes for Our Troops Operation Lasting Support in 2010, and have been donating monthly ever since.

Danny made a miraculous recovery, and through hard work and perseverance, he even learned to walk again.

Then, sadly, tragedy struck again on October 30, 2012; Danny was killed in a motorcycle accident. As a tribute to their son's legacy, Donna and Mike established an online memorial page where friends and family could donate in Danny's memory. They hope their gift will help bring comfort to another military family in need.



**Mike and Donna Bush**



**Danny Bush**

### Walter Bardenwerper, NH

In 2006, Walter Bardenwerper grew concerned about the growing numbers of Service Members returning with life-altering injuries and how they managed to complete everyday tasks such as cooking, bathing, or tucking their kids into bed. Then he learned about Homes for Our Troops from his son, Will, who at the time was an Infantry Captain serving with the 1st Armored Division in Nineveh and Anbar Provinces, Iraq. Walter was impressed with HFOT's home design and the innovative adaptations it provides to help these Heroes with their every day challenges. Wanting to be part of that solution, Walter joined Operation Lasting Support in 2006. Today, he is proud to still be an active Charter Member.

"I had then, and have now, an enormous respect for these men and women serving and facing the dangers of combat," says Walter. "And I hope these modified homes make life a little easier for the families of those who were wounded protecting our freedom."

#### What's your HFOT story?

*What inspires you to give to HFOT? Maybe we built in your area, or you came across us on the [charitynavigator.org](http://charitynavigator.org) website as a top-rated Veterans charity worth supporting. Tell us why you support HFOT at [myreason@hfotusa.org](mailto:myreason@hfotusa.org). We'd love to hear what makes Homes for Our Troops one of your favorite causes!*



**Walter Bardenwerper**



Army SPC Adrian Garcia  
El Paso, Texas



Taking care of Veterans is not charity...

*It's our Duty*

Help us restore freedom and independence to the estimated 1,900 Service Members like Army SPC Adrian Garcia who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan with life-altering injuries.

Let's provide these Heroes with the specially adapted, mortgage-free homes they need.

***DONATE TODAY***

**WWW.HFOTUSA.ORG**



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*Building Homes, Rebuilding Lives*

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