



# Foundations

A Newsletter from Homes For Our Troops | [www.hfotusa.org](http://www.hfotusa.org) | July 2020

## *Moving Forward*



YOUR SUPPORT ENABLES VETERANS TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES

Dear Friends,

During the COVID-19 outbreak, you most likely have remained in the security and safety of your home. After all, your primary residence is supposed to be your sanctuary, a place to shelter yourself and your family from outside harm. However, imagine if your home was not a safe haven, but rather a place with obstacles and challenges? This is the harsh reality many severely injured post-9/11 Veterans face – they do not have enough room in their homes to maneuver their wheelchairs, so they are forced to endure the pain of wearing their prosthetics all day or are limited to one room.



Fortunately, Patriotic Americans like you understand how crucial the freedom and independence of an adapted home are to injured Veterans. Many of our home recipients have told us how grateful they are to have an environment where they can safeguard themselves and their families, and persevere during these times. You are the reason nearly 300 severely injured post-9/11 Veterans have this invaluable gift. As we celebrate Independence Day this month, please know you are exemplifying the true meaning of the holiday by restoring some of the freedom to our severely injured Veterans that they fought so hard to protect.

We have been able to continue our mission, with some modifications, throughout this COVID-19 period. Though we have postponed many of our build events to ensure our Veterans and their families remain safe, we are not delaying construction and Veterans moving into their homes. Recently, we delivered homes to Army SGT Daniel Casara in California and Army SGT Mario Lopez in Texas during modified, scaled down Key Ceremonies. We are working diligently to build homes for the over 70 severely injured Veterans in our program, and will continue to modify our events to protect our Veterans and supporters. In this issue, we will introduce you to one of these Veterans, Army Sergeant First Class Henry Escobedo. Henry gives a heartfelt account of how the prospect of receiving his home has brightened his entire outlook on life.

At Homes For Our Troops, the rebuilding lives aspect of our mission is the most important thing we do, and what makes us different from the vast majority of home building organizations. We stay with each Veteran long after they receive their home, offering support, guidance, assistance, and resources. In 2014, to enhance this aspect of our mission, we formed the Veteran Action and Advisory Team (VAAT), a group of HFOT Veterans and spouses who mentor fellow Veterans and HFOT staff. On page 4, you'll read about the great work the team is doing, and we'll introduce you to the VAAT's newly appointed president, Marine Captain Cameron West. We also highlight the achievements of his predecessor, Army Sergeant Steven Curry.

Thank you again for being a loyal supporter and helping us carry out our critical mission. You are assisting in transforming the lives of these great Americans.

Have a happy and safe Independence Day.

Sincerely,

*Bill* Ivey  
Executive Director

July 2020

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*On the cover:* On May 16, 2020, Army Sergeant Daniel Casara received his home in Southern California during a small, modified Key Ceremony. Pictured is Daniel with his mom Elaine and his wife Basia.



## A History of Excellence

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



## *Letter from Army SFC Henry Escobedo*

As I sit here and begin to type this letter all I can do is smile. Yes, smile because of all the great things that have come to my life and what is in store for the future. Of course, I must say all those changes and great things came from an organization named Homes For Our Troops (HFOT).

Hello, my name is Henry Escobedo and I am a severely injured Veteran. I honorably served 12 years in the United States Army as an Indirect Fire Infantryman. However, due to life circumstances my career in the military came to a short end, not by choice but by God's will. I wish I can say that everything was fine and dandy after being separated from the military due to my medical circumstances. However, I would be lying if I was to make such a statement. As human beings we have future plans and goals to achieve. Mine came to a halt when I got injured and lost my vision. I can still remember that day clearly as if it was yesterday. My world collapsed. My perception of life was lost and my independence vanished. I was deep in a hole surrounded by despair, anger, and most of all, the feeling of hopelessness. I had lost my career and the ability to continue on as a normal individual. My thoughts were cloudy, confusing, and overwhelmed with major concerns. Especially, because I have a family I need to take care of and provide for. I am supposed to be the one taking care of them and providing for their needs, not the other way around.

I had a major hurdle to tackle and jump over in order to pick myself up and live life. That day came when I tackled and jumped over that hurdle. That day was more than magnificent because Homes For Our Troops gave me the biggest news of my life. It felt like I had won the lottery. Words could not explain the emotions and feelings that I had that day. My wife and I came across the organization online and decided to apply. In actuality, all we were looking for was assistance in modifying some light fixtures and light bulbs (natural light) at home in order to cope better with my vision. When my world felt like it was collapsing and I was in the deepest agonies of my life, HFOT gave me that light needed to see the path to success. They are providing me with a specially adapted custom home to suit my needs and injury. I was only looking for light bulbs, but they are giving me more than that, a forever home. Can you imagine how wonderful that is and how much pressure has been lifted off my shoulders? HFOT has gone beyond their scope of duty, selfless service, and responsibilities in helping our Veterans. Not only have they helped me but they have also changed my life and my family's.

I am beyond thankful for HFOT because of what they have done for me and other Veterans. To be honest with you, I never thought I would become the person that I am now. I am currently working on completing my master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. I have come out of the shadows and have changed my perception toward life and my future goals. This organization has given me that opportunity because I now know my family and I will have a home where we can become better and conquer whatever challenge comes our way. Knowing that I can provide my family with a roof over their head, a secure and safe place, and a home where I can become independent is a dream come true.

You may be asking yourself what is the purpose of writing this letter. Well, that is because I want to thank HFOT, their donors, staff, and volunteers. To the donors: I want to say that without your support I would have not been able to overcome my despair. Without your donations and support, I would have not had the opportunity to give myself a second chance at becoming a better person. From the bottom of my heart please allow me to thank you for what you do and the support you give to HFOT.

As I mentioned in the beginning, as I sit here and begin to type this letter all I can do is smile. Yes, smile because of all the great things that have come to my life and what is in store for the future. Thank you HFOT for giving me that motivation, determination, and, most of all, hope to living life at its fullest again. Thank you for providing me that confidence in becoming independent once again. Thank you for giving me that light needed to follow a successful path in life. My family and I thank you for the opportunity and immense joy that all this has brought us. My heart goes out to the HFOT staff, the donors, and volunteers. Please receive my most humble and sincere Thank You. May God bless you all for what you do and may God continue to give you the strength to continue doing what you are doing.

You have completely changed my life and I can sincerely say that I could have not done it without your support. God Bless You All.



# Veteran Action & Advisory Team (VAAT)

## *Moving the Momentum Forward*



Marine Capt Cameron West  
(2015 HFOT home recipient)

Marine Captain Cameron West was so grateful to the Homes For Our Troops staff upon being welcomed into the HFOT Family in 2014, he felt called to do something in return. "I wanted to give back by providing my personal insight into the necessities of the home while also furthering the connection between Veterans and the wonderful staff working within HFOT," he says.

Shortly after his acceptance into the HFOT family, Cameron joined the Veteran Action and Advisory Team (VAAT). The VAAT is a team of HFOT Veterans that guides and mentors HFOT Veterans and staff on a wide range of topics, including product selections and design improvements to the homes. The group also provides insight to the Veteran community, and is a resource for HFOT Veterans dealing with challenges. Cameron has been on the team since its inception and this past May, volunteered for the role of VAAT President.



Marine Cpl  
Jon Schumacher &  
Courtney Schumacher  
(2014 HFOT home recipient)



Army MSG Eric Marts  
(2017 HFOT home recipient)

Cameron finds the connections he makes during outreach calls to be the most fulfilling part about being on the VAAT. During his time as president, he plans to focus on facilitating relationships between HFOT Families who live in the same region. "Since severely injured Veterans are such a small percentage of the much larger Veteran population, I think it is important for those individuals and families to continue those strong connections with others in similar situations," he says. "This would hopefully prevent isolation for Veterans by having friends to confide in as most of us did with our fellow warriors during rehab. This benefits not only the Veteran populace but also the civilian communities by creating healthier and stronger families within them."



Army SGT Carlos Vasquez  
(2017 HFOT home recipient)



Marine Sgt Chris Santiago  
(2013 HFOT home recipient)

In addition to his work on the VAAT, Cameron has several significant accomplishments in his personal life since receiving his home in Acworth, Ga., in 2015. He and his wife have had two of their three children; he has started a business raising cattle for commercial and registered Angus breeders; and his wife has started her own private practice. "The home's layout is perfect for a wheelchair user or someone who needs an ADA compliant situation. It makes it possible for me to be a stay-at-home dad during the week with three kids, and then ranch and work on the weekends," he says.

Outgoing HFOT President Steven Curry, who has been leading the team since 2017, says he has full confidence in passing the torch to his successor. "Cam has been an integral part of the VAAT. I believe his knowledge of the organization, dedication to the mission, and leadership qualities will prove to be extremely valuable to HFOT," Steven says.

Steven says he is proud of the accomplishments the team and he have achieved during his time as president, especially staying connected with Veterans and providing insight to the Board and executives from a Veteran perspective. As for his future plans, Steven is focusing on his flight training and working toward his goal of transitioning his career out of a cubicle and into the cockpit.



Marine Sgt Milan Franklin  
(2019 HFOT home recipient)



Army SPC Brett Bondurant  
(2014 HFOT home recipient)

The VAAT president has a seat on the HFOT Board of Directors. Board Chairman GEN (ret.) Richard Cody has been impressed with the knowledge Steven has provided the Board of Directors and is looking forward to working with Cameron. "I am incredibly proud of the work Steven accomplished leading the VAAT and serving as a Board Member. His knowledge and insight have been vital to the Board and the organization. While we will miss Steven's expertise, I am thrilled to have Cameron take the lead. He has been an influential member of the VAAT since its inception in 2014, and I am looking forward to seeing him continue the VAAT's momentum," says GEN Cody.



The Kennedy Family

## Quarantining Safely at Home

"My family and I feel so fortunate to have a home where we can quarantine safely and securely. It is especially beneficial to have an environment where I am comfortable and can use my wheelchair when needed. We are forever grateful for our HFOT home." - **Marine Sergeant Marshall Kennedy**

"Ten weeks of quarantine has made me think about the amazing gift of the handicap-accessible home that was given to us by Homes For Our Troops. I WANT to shelter-in-place here and I don't know how we would navigate Joshua's injuries (plus our kids) in a place that was not accessible. Oh wait, yes, I do. It would be just like life before we received this home— Josh falling all the time, our children getting into places that he couldn't, wearing prosthetics for 12 hours a day because his wheelchair couldn't get through the doorways, 'showering' in a tub because the shower head is four feet over his head, and me screaming in terror when I see Josh climbing on countertops to get things out of cabinets. We are free because we are safe." - **Paige Wetzel, wife of Army SGT Joshua Wetzel**



The Wetzel Family

Learn more by visiting [www.hfotusa.org](http://www.hfotusa.org)

## — Donor Spotlight —

### Najib Azar uses 60th Birthday to Rally for the Troops

Having immigrated to the United States from Lebanon, it's important to Najib "Naji" Azar to support the Veterans who protect and defend the country that has given so much to him. "I am grateful to this country for the opportunities I have had here to build my life and raise my children in safety and peace, all thanks to our troops who sacrificed everything to protect this nation," he says.

For his 60th Birthday, Najib wanted to celebrate the milestone surrounded by loved ones while supporting the Homes For Our Troops mission of building and donating specially adapted custom homes for severely injured post-9/11 Veterans. He has been a dedicated supporter of the organization since its inception in 2004.

At his birthday bash last November, Naji asked his 100+ party guests to donate to HFOT in lieu of gifts, and also had a collection stand at the event. The party was a success, raising several thousand dollars for the organization.



Is there a special way you would like to support the Homes For Our Troops mission? Learn more at [www.hfotusa.org/ways](http://www.hfotusa.org/ways)



## Masks in the Making

In March of this year, the COVID-19 outbreak led to many states shutting down businesses and issuing shelter-in-place orders. These restrictions created uncertainty for small business owners, now facing declining revenue, as well as trying to maintain their workforce. Patriot Coolers, one of Homes For Our Troops' Corporate Partners, overcame this challenge by adapting their production from coolers and drinkware to facemasks. The company is donating \$1 to Homes For Our Troops for every mask sold.

As the virus continued to spread, demand for facial coverings increased as many states and communities started requiring patrons to wear them while out in their communities. "We saw the need early in March when there were no masks available for first responders, so we started a small mask manufacturing business within Patriot Coolers," says Patriot Coolers President Peter Hirsch. "As with all Patriot products, we are proud to partner and donate a portion of the proceeds to HFOT."

"It is great to see partners like Patriot Coolers adapt their business to continue to help our Veterans, their employees, and the community by producing masks. We are proud to have Patriot Coolers and its exceptional team supporting our mission," says HFOT Executive Director Bill Ivey.

Patriot Coolers was founded in Houston, Texas, in 2017 with the mission to produce an affordable outdoor lifestyle brand that honors and gives back to U.S. Military Veterans. Since their inception, Patriot Coolers has contributed exclusively to Homes For Our Troops, in addition to offering military and first responders discounts.

Homes For Our Troops is grateful for the continued support of our Corporate Partners whose commitment to the mission during this crisis is unwavering.



*Corporate Partner Patriot Coolers adapted their production during the pandemic from drinkware to facemasks and are donating a portion of proceeds to HFOT.*



Is your business or organization interested in joining our mission? Learn more at [www.hfotusa.org/partner](http://www.hfotusa.org/partner)

## Luminate Donor Center

To enhance your giving experience, Homes For Our Troops recently launched a new donor center. The portal provides access to your giving history, enables you to customize the communications you receive from HFOT, and gives you the ability to update your contact information.



Log in and check out your profile today at

[https://secure2.convio.net/hfotus/site/SPageNavigator/member\\_center.html](https://secure2.convio.net/hfotus/site/SPageNavigator/member_center.html)

## WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT PARTNERSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT



*Joining Forces, Increasing Impact*

### Wounded Warrior Project Commits \$450,000 for Funding of Adaptations and Features in HFOT Homes

Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) recently awarded Homes For Our Troops a \$450,000 grant to support several key adaptations including the 360-degree walkways around HFOT homes to be built in 2020 and 2021.

WWP has been a National Partner with HFOT since 2018. CEO Lieutenant General (USA, Retired) Michael Linnington says WWP remains “committed in spirit and action to partnering with those who share in our vision to transform the way America’s Veterans are empowered, employed, and engaged in their communities.”

“We could not be happier than to be enhancing our partnership with Wounded Warrior Project,” says HFOT President and CEO Tom Landwermeyer. “It is especially critical during this time to have solid partnerships that will endure the current challenges. Our Veterans absolutely need these specially adapted homes, and the impact on them and their families after receiving a home is truly life changing.”

The adaptations funded by the grant include the roll-in shower in the master bathroom, designed by HFOT to provide complete accessibility and safety. The showers provide Veterans easy wheelchair access, and an “L-shaped” bench to support transfer from a wheelchair. This feature is one many Veterans and their spouse-caregivers most look forward to in their HFOT home, because of the independence and peace of mind it brings. The 360-degree walkways enable Veterans to access the entire perimeter of the home on a smooth and level surface.

Through its continued support, WWP helps HFOT bring life-changing outcomes to the Veterans and families we serve.



Is your business or organization interested in joining our mission? Learn more at: [www.hfotusa.org/partner](http://www.hfotusa.org/partner)

## *Increasing Motivation*



On Dec. 21, 2007, Army Sergeant Bryan Camacho, serving as an Infantryman with the 1-87 Infantry, 10th Mountain Division, was searching for an ammunition cache with his unit in Hawija, Iraq, when another patrol in a nearby village was hit by an improvised explosive device (IED). SGT Camacho and his unit were attempting to respond when his vehicle ran over a secondary IED. The blast threw SGT Camacho from the turret of the vehicle, breaking his back and paralyzing him from the waist down.

A few years later, Bryan faced a major setback in his recovery. On Nov. 15, 2014, Bryan’s adapted truck spun out on ice and rolled into a ditch, breaking his neck and paralyzing him from the neck down. The injury took away the independence he worked so hard to regain.

Bryan received his specially adapted custom home in Murfreesboro, Tennessee last September and until recently, has spent much of his time in bed with issues related to his medical condition. Now that Bryan is living in a barrier-free environment, he has the energy to do physical therapy in his garage exercise area. He has regained the ability to use his right arm to manipulate a BowFlex machine, and plans to start a regular exercise routine with the help of his friend and caregiver, Liam.

Bryan’s new specially adapted custom home provides the motivation he needs to get moving in the right direction of recovery. “I’m tired of waiting for the pain to go away. It’s time to just start working on it,” he says.

Read more inspiring stories at: [www.hfotusa.org](http://www.hfotusa.org)

# Host a Virtual Fundraiser!

*We're Homes For Our Troops, Building Homes, Rebuilding Lives, Our severely injured Veterans gave so much; they deserve to thrive.*

*Times are totally different, but there are still ways, To support these deserving Veterans and brighten their days.*

*Let's all get creative and raise some dough. Grab your friends, grab your family; It's time to go!*

*Working together, having fun, each step of the way, You too can make a difference; the virtual way!*

*Make search engines your friend and ask what to do. The sky is the limit, we believe in you!*

*From game nights to cooking, and happy hours too. Run races, host concerts; let's support the red, white, and blue!*

*Volunteering and fundraising play a role in our vision. So, reach out today, and join our mission!*



*Krista*



*Victoria*

*Michelle*

If you are interested in hosting a Virtual Fundraising event of your own, contact the Fundraising Team at: [ifundraising@hfotusa.org](mailto:ifundraising@hfotusa.org)

## Save The Date!

## JULY 13, 2020



HOMES FOR OUR TROOPS  
*Day of Giving*  
7.13.20

Join us in Building Homes and Rebuilding Lives

### FIND & FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

Keep up-to-date on all things HFOT by following us for the latest information, photos, videos, events, e-store specials and more!





# Thank you to all of our Corporate Partners!

