



# Foundations

A Newsletter from Homes for Our Troops

| [www.hfotusa.org](http://www.hfotusa.org)

| FEB 2015



## UNLOCKING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

The Business of Freedom Beards

| 49ers Salute to Service

| HFOT'S Build Partner of the Year

# MOVING THE MISSION FORWARD

## *HFOT Launches Veteran Action and Advisory Team (VAAT)*

A big factor in Homes for Our Troops' high ratings as a Veterans charity has much to do with the organization's ability to look ahead and find ways to better serve its Veterans and their families. Last fall, the organization took another forward-thinking step when HFOT Veterans and Executive Leadership created a new Veteran Action and Advisory Team (VAAT).

The VAAT is led by Veteran and Board Member Adam Kisielewski. Other members include HFOT Veterans Joseph Beimfohr, Robert Canine, Mike Leonard, Eric Marts, Luke Murphy, Samuel Shockley, Julian Torres and Cameron West. The members were selected based on military experience, geography, experiences out of the military, and types of injuries, as well as their time in the HFOT program. The team conducted its first meeting in December, where each member was provided an overview of the operational side of HFOT, and worked collectively to strategize on ways to advance its mission and assist its Veterans. As the VAAT moves forward, membership will rotate to bring in fresh ideas.

Cameron West's role on the team is to help fellow HFOT Veterans assimilate back at home and in their community. He believes his experience as a wounded Veteran will assist him in relating to others. "I'm proud to be a part of the VAAT Team and hope to give back to the Veterans of HFOT with the highest appreciation they deserve," he says.

Robert Canine, the team's secretary, relates the VAAT mission to a motto all U.S. Military Veterans know... "The VAAT will never leave a fallen comrade that may be suffering mentally or physically from wounds received in combat," he says. Canine, who received his HFOT home in 2010, believes his training as an Army Infantryman, Non-Commissioned Officer and Squad Leader will serve him well on the team. He also hopes to share his experience. "It took me 18 months to physically recover and over four years to mentally recover after my amputations," he says. "The VAAT was organized to help Veterans through this difficult recovery process."

In addition to assisting other Veterans going through challenges, Kisielewski says the VAAT members will assist with marketing and fundraising initiatives, and provide feedback to HFOT's President, Tim McHale and Executive Director, Bill Ivey, and the Board of Directors. This feedback will be collected based on their own experiences as well as that of other HFOT Veterans in the program. When appropriate, the members will also collaborate with other non profits to further promote HFOT's mission.

Ivey says the team will strive to maintain relationships with all the Veterans within the program, and that every HFOT home recipient should be hearing from a VAAT member soon if they haven't already. "Tim McHale and I are very excited with the way the Veterans have taken on the initiative to make HFOT a better organization," he says.



HFOT's Veteran Action and Advisory Team: (Top) Joseph Beimfohr, Robert Canine, Adam Kisielewski, Mike Leonard. (Bottom) Eric Marts, Luke Murphy, Samuel Shockley, Julian Torres and Cameron West.

## BUILDING ON SUCCESS: Meet HFOT's Construction Department

Our Veterans consider the specially adapted homes we build for them their "Forever Home." HFOT's Construction Team members are the ones who work behind the scenes to make that happen by ensuring the structures are safe and sound to last a lifetime.

The department consists of Construction Operations Director Mike Duckett, Production Manager Mike Burke, General Contractor Procurement Specialist Justin Silvia and three Construction Managers: Joe Taveira, Andrew Bell and John "Robo" Robicheau. All six will be busy this year - the organization is poised to deliver 40 more homes nationwide to Veterans in 2015, and will begin construction on at least another 43.

Since the team is based out of the HFOT Headquarters in Massachusetts, general contractors in the areas of each build are used. "We continually provide guidance and support to ensure that all homes are properly delivered and effectively meet the needs of our Veterans," Duckett says. Additionally, each home is built using HFOT's proprietary home plans and is physically inspected by Construction Managers at least three times throughout the project. "Over the years, we've continued to improve our design to increase accessibility and utility for the Veterans," reports Duckett.

Overseeing the completion of homes for HFOT's Veterans and their families certainly leaves an imprint on the team members. Robicheau, who has been with the organization since its inception in 2004, says the best part of his job is the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of Veterans and their families. He fondly remembers the energy from the community with HFOT's first home delivery to SGT Peter Damon in Middleboro, Massachusetts. "With 9/11 fresh on people's minds, the pulling together and camaraderie of those involved is something I will always remember," he says.



*The HFOT Construction Team.*



## Corporate Partner News



*Future HFOT recipient, Army Captain Bobby Withers (left), joins CertaPro's Abbie Wahl on stage at the company's National Conference in Disney World last month. CertaPro Painters contributed over \$200,000 to HFOT in 2013-14 through various fundraising efforts.*

Learn more about CertaPro's support at [www.hfotusa.org/corporate\\_partners](http://www.hfotusa.org/corporate_partners) and Army Captain Bobby Withers [www.hfotusa.org/withers](http://www.hfotusa.org/withers)



**Marine Sergeant Toran Gaal**

After losing both legs during an improvised explosive device (IED) blast in Afghanistan, Marine Sergeant Toran Gaal spent two months in a coma. During that time doctors weren't sure if he would be able to walk or talk again.

Now almost four years later, Gaal's comeback has been nothing short of miraculous. Not only does he walk on prosthetics, but he surfs, hand cycles and endures grueling workouts at Cross Fit. He's also interned with several publicly traded companies and worked with Congressman Duncan D. Hunter in the U.S. House of Representatives.

# Conquering the Odds

*A Marine Veteran looks to a future with endless possibilities*

This past January, Gaal reached another milestone – he proposed to his girlfriend Lisa Graves. The couple is planning a wedding for March 2016. The two met when Graves interviewed him for a book she is writing called “After” under her pen name R.J. Belle. The book features several Veterans and their experiences in combat and the effects of war.

Gaal's also excited about the new specially adapted home in San Diego County that HFOT will provide to him mortgage-free. Currently the project is in the land search phase. Once completed, Gaal says, “My family will be able to live under one roof with the maximum amount of space.”

Without the burden of a mortgage, Gaal says he'll be able to focus on his career and giving back to other Veterans. Additionally, Gaal is looking forward to having space for his athletic equipment, which he'll be putting to good use in the coming months. In April, Gaal will be hand cycling in the Boston Marathon. He's also planning a cross-country trip this summer to raise funds for other injured Veterans.

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*“My family will be able to live under one roof with the maximum amount of space.”*

*-Toran Gaal*

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Then there's the wedding he'll be planning with his fiancée.

“I am overjoyed as to where my life has taken me,” says Gaal. “I wake up and feel so blessed that fighting for a great nation led to a life that I never would have imagined.”

To read more about Toran and his specially adapted home project, visit [www.hfotusa.org/gaal](http://www.hfotusa.org/gaal).

**Toran Gaal and fiancée Lisa Graves.**  
Photo Credit: Michael Frazier/ Frazier Graphix



# ABOUT FACE

## THE BUSINESS OF FREEDOM BEARDS

After retiring from the military - and years of keeping their faces clean shaven - many Veterans grow what's called a "Freedom Beard." Marine Sergeant James "Matt" Amos did just that and recently started up a business to help men keep their facial hair in good shape. Through his business, Admiral's Pennant, Amos makes and sells beard oil and plans to use his profits for good.

Unhappy with the garden variety of beard oils on the market, Amos started making his own. Using a mix of Argan, Jojoba and essential oils, he found the right combination. He officially filed for a Limited Liability Company (LLC) in October 2014 and is now hoping to get his website ([www.admiralspennant.com](http://www.admiralspennant.com)) fully operational by March. Right now, he has five blends in the "Flagship Collection," all inspired by events in American history.

Eventually, Amos would like to generate a level of income from his business that he can donate back to charities that have helped his family during his time of need, including Homes for Our Troops. "Giving back is something I firmly believe in," he says.

Amos lost both legs and broke his pelvis during an improvised explosive device blast (IED) in Sangin, Afghanistan in 2011. Homes for Our Troops awarded him a specially adapted home in Mount Hope, Kansas in September 2013.

Amos says his new venture would not have been possible without his home. From a financial standpoint, he says, there was no way he could have started this endeavor if he had a mortgage. Additionally, the option to work from home at his kitchen's roll-under counter tops - where he mixes each bottle of beard oil by hand - is a huge convenience. "That's what it's all about - doing what you love," he says. "And being able to do that from a fully accessible, mortgage-free home is absolutely perfect," he says.

The home also gives Amos time for his work at *Chili Off the Grid*, a Sportsman Channel TV series scheduled to air in April. He says the experience on the show is challenging, yet very rewarding.



**Sgt Matt Amos, HFOT home recipient**

The show provides an opportunity for Veterans to bond outdoors and connect with a national network for support and employment.

When Amos is not busy with his business or the show, he enjoys spending time at home with his wife Audrie and their two daughters. "I am truly grateful to Homes for Our Troops, their donors, and the folks who join up for a cause to help someone else," he says.

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**"...being able to do that from a fully accessible, mortgage-free home is absolutely perfect,"**

*-Matt Amos*

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**Admiral's Pennant Beard Oil - launched by Marine Sergeant Matt Amos.**

## HFOT Names Taylor Morrison as Build Partner of the Year

Homes for Our Troops (HFOT) has named Taylor Morrison as its Build Partner of the Year for 2014. The distinction was made in recognition of the company's professionalism, dedication to HFOT's mission, and commitment to craftsmanship, particularly for the construction project for Marine Sgt Robert Bruce and his wife Megan in Mesa, Arizona.

The Bruces received their new specially adapted home from HFOT on Nov. 15, 2014 as part of its Homes for the Holidays campaign.

Robert was on his fourth deployment when he lost both of his legs and sustained multiple shrapnel wounds when he stepped on an IED in Afghanistan on March 9, 2011.



**Representatives from HFOT and Taylor Morrison at the Bruce Family Key Ceremony, November 2014.**

Of the home's 40 major adapted features, Megan says Robert finds the lowered stove top the most useful. "If I'm not home he can be independent and make his own meals," she says. "The roll-in shower and tub are also incredibly helpful."

The couple's favorite room, Megan says, is the master bedroom where Robert has ample room to move around. "Simply put, Taylor Morrison was awesome, and the home is perfect. We couldn't have asked for a better build partner for our home."

Charlie Enochs, Phoenix Division President at Taylor Morrison says his company was extremely proud and humbled by their experience in building Sgt Bruce's mortgage-free home, and that it is a privilege to give back to someone who has given our country so much. "We have been overwhelmed by the support we received from our trade partners, suppliers, and the Phoenix community - all who helped us and HFOT make a very significant impact on the Bruce family's life."

*Homes for Our Troops is always looking for professional builders nationwide to lead dedicated subcontractors, suppliers, and laborers to partner with us in our mission of building specially adapted homes for severely injured Veterans. To find out how you and your company can make a difference, visit [www.hfotusa.org/building-partner](http://www.hfotusa.org/building-partner)*



**Carlos Garcia holds up a ceremonial key at San Francisco 49ers game, November 2014.**

## Salute to Service

As part of the San Francisco 49ers Salute to Service celebration, the 49ers invited several HFOT Veterans to Levi's Stadium on November 23, 2014 to be honored during their game-day activities. The game kicked off with Marine Sgt Josh Sweeney blowing the opening Fog Horn. At the end of the first quarter, members of the 49ers Community Relations Team and Foundation presented Marine Cpl Carlos Garcia with a ceremonial key to his new HFOT home in Murrieta, CA.

5<sup>th</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY

## Celebrating Five Years of Freedom

Update from Army SSG Michael Downing,  
HFOT home recipient 2010

February 26 marks five years that retired Army SSG Mike Downing, his wife Dawnalee and their four children received a new specially adapted home in Middleborough, Mass. from Homes for Our Troops. During that time Downing's been able to focus on his family and recovery, and doing the things he loves, including hunting, fishing, playing golf and coaching his daughter's softball team.

"It's hard to believe it's been five years since we've moved in," says Downing. "The family's doing very well." Receiving the home, he says, has removed the burden of a mortgage and the worry about living in a safe environment for him and his family. Specifically, Downing says, "It also allows my family to concentrate on other things such as school and just being kids."

An ardent advocate of HFOT's mission, Downing has attended various HFOT fundraiser events and spoken on its behalf. He remains forever grateful to the supporters of HFOT who helped with his home project.



*Army SSG Mike Downing*

## Team HFOT Works Its Magic at Disney



*Left to right Brad Lang, Shauna & Anthony Verra, Holly & Alex Dillmann.*

During January 8 - 10, 2015, members of Team HFOT took part in the Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend and raised over \$63,000 for Homes for Our Troops' mission. The team included 92 participants who competed in the 5K, 10K, Half Marathon, Full Marathon, Goofy Challenge, and Dopey Challenge. Special kudos to HFOT home recipients - Alex Dillmann, Brad Lang, and Anthony Verra - who competed in the full marathon as hand-cyclists.

If you've ever considered running a race to raise money for a worthy cause, consider joining Team HFOT in 2015. You'll get all the help and guidance you need to participate, including a personalized fundraising webpage along with technical support. And just know - you don't have to be a fast or avid runner - all you need is a passion for helping Veterans.

Visit [www.hfotusa.org/TeamHFOT](http://www.hfotusa.org/TeamHFOT).

Help us provide specially adapted homes to our nation's most severely injured Veterans by becoming a Charter Member\* of



- Convenience of automatic monthly deduction
- Email and newsletter updates on how your donation is helping HFOT's mission of Building Homes, Rebuilding Lives
- Limited edition Operation Lasting Support magnet

Double your donation! Check with your employer to see if they match employees' charitable contributions!

*\*A minimum of \$10 per month is required to enroll as a Charter member*

[www.hfotusa.org/ols](http://www.hfotusa.org/ols)

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