

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

This November, our nation will vote in its 57th quadrennial presidential election, an event that underscores the very freedom and democracy our American servicemen and women protect every day. As this date approaches, we are mindful that each and every day, there are factions around the world, as evidenced most recently in the Middle East and North Africa, that threaten these and other liberties that we hold so dear. Our hearts were especially heavy upon learning about last September's attacks at the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens, and former Navy SEAL, Glen A. Doherty.

While our country anxiously watches the civil unrest play out, sentiment seems to be growing among both party lines for our newly elected president, whomever that leader will be, to withdraw our troops in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and "Bring Them Home." Both candidates offer their own plan to do just that, albeit different timetables and exit strategies.

But the mission of Homes for Our Troops goes far beyond matters of foreign diplomacy or political campaign rhetoric. We believe we have a greater duty to those men and women who have valiantly served our country and defended our freedoms, especially to those who have returned home with life altering injuries such as missing limbs and paralysis. We mustn't stop at "Bring Them Home." And that is why we at Homes for Our Troops instead focus on ***What these heroes need when we do Bring Them Home.*** The answer to us is simple: they need a specially adapted home so they can live independently and barrier-free, without worrying about how their family will afford it.

I had the pleasure of attending our 9-11 Golf Classic... and had an opportunity to hear how grateful Army SGT Tim Johannsen was to be in his specially adapted home. It is an immensely satisfying feeling to know that in some way I was part of his reintegration back at home and in his community. Our waiting list for veterans who require specially adapted homes grows each month. Although we have completed 114 home build projects since we started in 2004, there are hundreds more who need our help now that they have returned home with catastrophic injuries. For this reason, I ask you to support our mission today with a tax deductible donation to Homes for Our Troops. No gift is too small, and your support will go a long way in restoring the freedom and independence these veterans have lost.

This Veterans Day, November 11, I ask you to ponder the significance of this holiday and think about the phrase "Bring Them Home." What will you do to welcome them home? Will it be a collection of that you banners and signs posted around town, or maybe a hero's welcome at the airport? Such welcoming gestures are appreciated by our selfless troops, as they try making the transition back to civilian life. But what will you do for the veteran who is reminded of his injuries every day when he cannot walk up the stairs to tend to his infant, or when he cannot reach for a bottle placed too high in the kitchen cabinet? How can you truly thank him for what he and his family have sacrificed?

Our elected officials are left with the imperative decisions of when and how to "Bring Them Home," but we as grateful citizens have the power to do so much more for these heroes when they do return. Please do your part and help our mission today.

Thank you in advance for your continued support.



Kenneth O. Preston

President, Homes for Our Troops



SMA (USA, Ret.) Kenneth O. Preston
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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HFOT

VETERAN TIM (TJ) JOHANNSEN TAKES A SWING AT FUNDRAISING FOR THE CAUSE



"I wanted to help pay it forward because I felt so lucky and honored to receive a home from HFOT that I wanted to help make sure other vets have the same opportunity I did."

-SGT TJ JOHANNSEN

The game of golf is challenging enough, but when you're missing the most basic foundation of a golf swing—namely, your two legs—it's hardly a walk in the park. But to Army SGT Tim Johannsen, who was left a double amputee in 2007 after an IED explosion in Iraq, organizing and participating in a golf tournament fundraiser to benefit Homes for Our Troops is really a labor of love. "I wanted to help pay it forward because I felt so lucky and honored to receive a home from HFOT that I wanted to help make sure other vets have the same opportunity I did," says Johannsen.

In June of 2007, SGT Johannsen's vehicle rolled over a pressure plated IED that exploded through the floorboard, immediately amputating his right leg below the knee and his left leg above the knee. A medic and medevac team is credited with saving TJ's life after the blast. Johannsen was stabilized and transported to a local hospital then airlifted to Landstuhl, Germany, and finally to Walter Reed Army Medical Center where he received treatment and therapy for two and a half years.

Johannsen and his family moved into their specially adapted home donated by Homes for Our Troops in March, 2011. The home has been 'life changing,' and offers him full independence and accessibility, a huge improvement over the tri-level and barrier-filled living space he was in. Johannsen, who's been golfing now for over three years, came up with the idea for a golf tournament back in November of 2010. "I had no idea how to start a fundraiser," Johannsen admits. He was then introduced to Dan McGrath, who showed him the ins and outs, and now, well, he's no amateur. The two tournaments have netted over \$56,000 for Homes for Our Troops. Down the road, it's likely that he'll have another buddy helping him out at future tournaments. "My son Oliver is 20 months old and he has some plastic golf clubs that he loves to hit balls with, so I'm hoping he takes up the game," he says.

SPONSORSHIP AND SUPPORT

SECOND ANNUAL HFOT GOLF CLASSIC

September 11th event raises 49k to build specially adapted homes for injured veterans

Upwards of 125 attendees came out to enjoy a gorgeous day of golf followed by dinner at HFOT's Second Annual Golf Classic, held on September 11, 2012 at the Spring Valley Country Club in Sharon, Mass.

A big thanks to the following sponsors for their support:

Tournament Sponsor: L-3

Dinner Sponsor: Wingate Healthcare

Tee Gift & Hero Sponsor: Volvo Rents

Cocktail Reception Sponsor: Rockalnd Trust

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HFOT Veteran Jacque Keeslar (left), HFOT Chairman of the Board/L-3 General (USA, Ret) Richard A. Cody, and Golf Classic Committee Member/L-3 VADM, USN (Ret) William Sullivan.

GOLD SPONSORS: O'Donnell & Tessitore LLP, Intertek, Walpole Co-operative Bank, Nixon Peabody LLP, Bryan Company, Pro-Care Inc, Spectra Energy, Intercontinental Real Estate Corporation, Omni Marketing Group, Braver Technology, Crown Point Cabinetry.

HFOT Awarded \$100,000 Grant from Bob Woodruff Foundation



Last September, The Bob Woodruff Foundation awarded Homes for Our Troops a grant in the amount of \$100,000. Proceeds from the grant will be used to construct walkways on specially adapted homes that HFOT builds for injured veterans. Founded in January of 2008, the Foundation provides resources and support to injured service members, veterans, and their families so they can have successful futures. For more information about The Bob Woodruff Foundation, visit www.ReMIND.org.

Your Enduring Support Will Help Build 100 More...Homes for Our Troops

A Marine corporal with over six years in the service earns \$2,325 each month, according to the Department of Defense. Couple that with \$675 hostile fire/imminent danger pay received each month by those service members deployed to a combat zone and monthly pay increases to \$3,000. ***This translates to \$692.30 per week paid to many of the brave men and woman who are thrust into harm's way on a daily basis.***

As we look to build 100 More...Homes for Our Troops, we need the support of the American people more than ever. Consider pledging \$3,000 toward this effort. Through Operation Enduring Support, you can contribute \$58 weekly, \$250 monthly, or one lump sum. Or, if you have a special service member in your life, consider pledging the equivalent of his or her monthly pay.

It's up to you, but it's a small price to pay to give back freedom and independence to our veterans who have served us and protected our safety.

For more information, visit us online at www.homesfourtroops.org/donate

www.homesfourtroops.org

DIGGING *the path to a brighter future*

Marine Staff Sgt. Brad Lang was hoping for a strong community turnout during the groundbreaking of his new Homes for Our Troops home. Yet even the several hundred people who showed up Saturday morning stunned him. "Not even this many people were at our wedding," said his wife Alyssa, as she spoke toward the end of the program, drawing laughs from everyone in attendance.

The Lang family – Brad, Alyssa and their nearly three-year-old son David – will soon receive a specially adapted home in Stella, NC. Theirs was among the first projects to be christened by a groundbreaking ceremony, which unlike the prior Build Brigade, did not include commencement of construction. Rather, it enabled the community to join the celebration, meet the Lang family, and learn more about becoming involved with Homes for Our Troops.

Staff Sergeant Lang lost both of his legs in July 2011 while serving his third tour in Afghanistan. He now gets around on prosthetic legs in public and a wheelchair at home. On Saturday, he wore his prosthetic legs and moved around quickly on a Segway.

"Just to get around in my house will mean so much," said Lang as he tried to hold back tears.



"I wish I could say this was the last home being built by Homes for Our Troops, but that's not the case. We urge every one of you to support this organization and help us continue to pay it forward."

-ARMY 1SG William "Mike" Leonard

In Peoria, Arizona, the same fanfare was shared for the Leonard family. Army First Sergeant William "Mike" Leonard, currently living in Washington state, selected the Phoenix suburb as the location for his new home. A broken hip prevented Mike and his wife Cheryl from traveling to their groundbreaking ceremony, but it didn't stop the crowd of nearly 200 from stopping by. The Leonards videotaped a message played during the ceremony. "Having a home that is flat and allows me to get around and takes the burden off my wife is going to change our life," said Leonard.

First Sergeant Leonard was on his fourth deployment when he lost both of his legs in an IED blast in Southern Helmand Province, Afghanistan on March 22, 2010. Despite his injury, he was quick to encourage others to support Homes for Our Troops and future veteran home recipients.

"I wish I could say this was the last home being built by Homes for Our Troops, but that's not the case," he said. "We urge every one of you to support this organization and help us continue to pay it forward."



Fiancée of fallen soldier finds solace in helping Homes for Our Troops

There's not a day that goes by that Talia Walsh doesn't think about the love of her life who was taken from her much too early. Her fiancé, 26-year-old Army Sergeant Jan Michael Argonish from Pennsylvania National Guard, was killed on August 27, 2007 during an ambush in Afghanistan.

But by assisting injured veterans in her area and volunteering for Home for Our Troops, she has found a source of comfort.

Each year, Walsh and Argonish's family and friends hold The SGT Jan Argonish Ride, a motorcycle benefit ride in Dalton, PA as a tribute to his service. Over the last five years, the event has netted over \$120,000, and all proceeds from the rides have benefitted veterans in her area, including two Homes for Our Troops recipients.

"I just love what Homes for Our Troops does," Walsh says. "Just to see how an adapted home helps these guys, it's amazing."

Walsh first learned about Homes for Our Troops from a Dunkin Donuts "koozie" bearing the HFOT logo and website.

She then went online and learned about the home-build project taking place at the time in Centre County, PA for Marine Sgt David Emery, who lost both legs while serving in Iraq. Proceeds from the 2009 second annual ride went to Emery's specially adapted home, where he now lives with his wife Angel.



"I just love what Homes for Our Troops does. Just to see how an adapted home helps these guys, it's amazing."

-Talia Walsh, HFOT volunteer and supporter



HFOT Key Volunteer Talia Walsh with Earl Granville at his Build Brigade event last July. Walsh runs an annual motorcycle ride fundraiser to help veterans and HFOT.

Walsh was introduced to Army SSG Earl Granville, a year prior, who lost his left leg when a roadside bomb exploded in Afghanistan. As the first year ride recipient, Earl was given a care package including an Xbox360, DVD's, snacks, gift certificates, and more to keep his mind occupied during his recovery. "Earl was living in a hotel room because he couldn't access his apartment," explains Walsh, who later persuaded him to apply for a specially adapted home from Homes for Our Troops. Walsh also served as the key volunteer at Granville's Build Brigade event in Scott Township, PA, last July. Earl made a special appearance during this year's ride. "We passed by his new house on our route as he stood outside waving a flag in his rucksack gear," says Walsh.

Walsh says that she's often asked if helping veterans ever gets too sad for her in light of her loss. "It doesn't," she tells them. "People like Earl motivate me to keep going. These guys are physically reminded every day of their loss and I wish I could take that away, but they keep moving forward and they inspire me to do the same."

BUILDING HIGHLIGHTS AND MILESTONES



Army SGT David Mayer celebrates the first wall raising of his new specially adapted home during his Build Brigade in Corona, CA.



Volunteers hard at work during Army Medic SSG Kelly Keck's Volunteer Day in Havre de Grace, MD.

COMPLETED BUILD BRIGADES

Marine Cpl Paul Schaus North Tonawanda, NY	July 27-28, 2012
Marine Capt PJ Glavey Brighton, CO	July 27-29, 2012
Marine GySgt John Hayes St. Augustine, FL	August 10-11, 2012
Army CPL Jeffrey Argrave Prarieville, LA	August 17-18, 2012
Army SGT David Mayer Corona, CA	August 24-25, 2012
Marine Cpl Christopher Montgomery Mobile, AL	August 24-25, 2012
Army SSG Joe Beimfohr Wesley Chapel, FL	Sept. 28-29, 2012

KEY CEREMONIES

Army CPL Issac Jensen West Point City, UT	August 11, 2012
Army SFC Sean Gittens Appling, GA	August 18, 2012

COMPLETED VOLUNTEER DAYS

Army Medic, SSG Kelly Keck Havre de Grace, MD	August 4, 2012
Army SSG Earl Granville Scott Township, PA	August 18, 2012
Marine Cpl Justin McLoud Festus, MO	September 8, 2012
Army SSG Brian Schar Elizabeth, CO	September 8, 2012
Marine SSgt Jack Pierce Temple, TX	September 15, 2012
Marine Cpl Paul Schaus North Tonawanda, NY	September 15, 2012
Marine LCpl Randal Wright Kuna, ID	September 15, 2012
Army SGT Tim Hall Hawthorne, NV	September 22, 2012
Marine Capt PJ Glavey Brighton, CO	September 29, 2012

GROUNDBREAKINGS

Marine SSgt Bradley Lang Stella, NC	October 6, 2012
Army 1SG William "Mike" Leonard Glendale, AZ	October 6, 2012

Future HFOT Recipient **Justin Gaertner**

Most of us only dream about appearing on TV, but former Marine Corporal Justin Gaertner is living that dream. Gaertner, a combat engineer who lost both legs while serving in Afghanistan, made his debut on the Lifetime TV series, *Army Wives*.

How Gaertner landed the gig reads right out of a movie script: one day his phone rang and the person on the other line asked him to be on the show. "I honestly thought they were pulling my leg," jokes Gaertner, who thought the caller might be a telemarketer. "But after talking to them a few times and getting my script, I was quite taken back and very surprised they chose me."

Filming for the episode took place in South Carolina on a set that was crafted from a gutted grocery store. Once on location, Gaertner was directed to hair and makeup. Reluctantly, he then donned his assigned wardrobe: an ARMY t-shirt. But showbiz folks learned they can only push this Marine so far. "Makeup did ask about covering up my Marine Corps tattoos and I told them 'That ain't gonna happen.'"

Gaertner says his few moments of face time in the episode actually took three days to film. "Every scene requires so many different camera angles," he explains. Behind the scenes, he and injured Army veterans/actor J.R. Martinez of *All My Children* and *Dancing with the Stars* fame, "messed around" and had the cast laughing the entire time.



Justin Gaertner stands clapping (center) in a scene from Lifetime TV's *Army Wives*. The episode aired last September. Photo courtesy of Lifetime Networks.

Makes Debut on TV's **ARMY WIVES**



"J.R. and I were the only wounded vets on set, so it was nice having him there because we both understood each other and got along real well."

When the episode aired last September, Gaertner threw a huge viewing party with family and friends. Now "TV actor" can be added to his list of notable achievements including war hero, Warrior Games (hand-cycling) medalist, DJ and skydiver. Says Gaertner, "All in all, it was an unforgettable

experience and I would gladly keep acting if asked for other roles."

Undoubtedly, fans will gladly keep watching him, too.

HOME... AT LAST!

Last spring in this newsletter, we published the story, "Hope for Our New Normal: A Veteran Caregiver's Story," and introduced you to Sharon Gittens and her family. The article chronicled the hardships that Sharon has endured while caring for her husband Army SFC Sean Gittens, who suffered multiple concussive traumas while serving in Iraq, and who subsequently at home, became paralyzed and non-communicative from an aneurism and stroke. It profiled the physical and emotional challenges she patiently and graciously overcomes each day as mother of four and tireless advocate for her husband's health and medical needs.

At the time of that story, Homes for Our Troops was nearing completion on the construction of a new specially adapted home for Sean Gittens and his family. Weeks later, close to 100 volunteers would help lay sod and mulch, and plant shrubs and flowers, putting the final touches on the home's exterior.

Finally, on August 18, under a hot Georgia sun, a Key Ceremony was held in their honor and the Gittens family moved into their new home built to suit Sean's needs. The story that follows is the beginning of their happy ending.

Sharon Gittens still has a bit of unpacking and chores to do since she moved into the new specially adapted home that was donated to her family by Homes for Our Troops last August. With the serene manner in which she's handled the adversity in her life, she takes it all in stride.

"We'll get there," she says.

Moving in, she knows, is a beautiful problem to have. Besides, she knows that she will have the luxury of a few more minutes of spare time in the day now that her husband Sean is becoming more independent. "Now that we have the space in the house with widened doors, he can use his new wheelchair; I don't always have to push him around," explains Gittens.

And just what has living in the new home been like for Sean Gittens? "It's a whole new him," says Sharon Gittens.

In the morning, she greets her husband whose wide-eyed face now reflects readiness and enthusiasm. "He wants to get up and stay up," she adds. This motivation and excitement was starkly contrasted by Sean's demeanor just weeks ago, when his access was limited to just one room in the two-story home they had been renting since he returned home from his deployment.



- **The Million Dollar Smile** Army SFC Sean Gittens shares a smile

"My hubby was able to take a real shower for the first time in over two years!"

-Sharon Gittens wife of Army SFC Sean Gittens (

The Gittens Family Moves In



During his Key Ceremony, an emotion that the family hopes to see more of in the future.



Sean and Sharon Gittens cut the ribbon to their new specially adapted home on August 18, 2012 during their Key Ceremony.

During that time, the confinement of his living arrangements cast a continual gaze of despair and isolation on Sean's facade, and it was difficult to get him to interact with her and the kids.

"Now he comes to eat with us because he can pull up to the table," says Sharon. With access to an outdoor walkway, Sean can now take off on his wheelchair and ride up and down the home's long driveway, an activity that has rekindled his spirit as well as his pride. Moving about freely from room to room, Sean can now actively join the family wherever activities are taking place, even if it's just stopping by one of his daughter's bedrooms, or watching TV together with the family.

Although Sean can only communicate with a bark-like yell or by pointing his arm to let family members know his needs, there are outward signs indicating that the 'old' Sean is making a comeback, and that the Gittens family is moving closer to their 'new normal life.' His wife notices he's more relaxed in the new home, yet he's showing a heightened level of awareness and interest in what's going on, too. "He likes those cooking channels," says Sharon.

Another milestone for Sean Gittens occurred on August 20th, an occasion Sharon celebrated and shared publicly on her Facebook page: "My hubby was able to take a real shower for the first time in over two years!" Thankfully, with the ease and efficiency of a roll-in shower feature in their new home's bathroom, Sean's daily hygiene is no longer limited to 'bed baths.' Gittens says she would like to thank everyone who contributed to their specially adapted home: the land donor, the laborers and the entire HFOT project team and volunteers. On behalf of her daughters, and above all, her soldier-the partner whom she took for life-for better, for worse, she has a message: "Thanks to each of you this would not be possible and we appreciate this so much. We are so blessed." Yes, by all accounts, life for the Gittens family in their new specially adapted home now is for the better.

Much better.