



# Foundations

A Newsletter from Homes For Our Troops | [www.hfotusa.org](http://www.hfotusa.org) | September 2023

*A Key to  
the Future!*



YOUR SUPPORT ENABLES VETERANS TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES

# A Letter from the President/CEO



Dear HFOT Supporters,

As we reflect on the anniversary of September 11, we remember the lives we lost, pay tribute to the courage of our first responders and military servicemembers, and honor those who continue to protect our country. For many of the Veterans we serve, the terrorist attacks of that day inspired them to defend our nation. These brave men and women joined the military or reenlisted, willing to put their lives on the line to serve the country they love.

Many of these courageous patriots sustained life-altering injuries and continue to feel the impact of that day. This is why our mission at Homes For Our Troops is so important. By providing specially adapted custom homes to our nation's severely injured post-9/11 Veterans, we restore some of the freedom and independence our Veterans sacrificed as a result of their service. Based on Veterans Affairs numbers of severely injured Veterans, we estimate that over 1,000 severely injured post-9/11 Veterans still need adapted housing. We will not rest until every Veteran who qualifies for one of our homes receives one. We can only do this with your continued commitment to our mission.

This 9/11 Remembrance newsletter demonstrates how you are changing the lives of these Veterans and their families. We introduce you to future home recipient Army Sergeant Brandon Rethmel and home recipient Marine Corporal Joshua Sust, two Veterans who were called to serve after the September 11 attacks. Brandon, featured on page 3, is looking forward to moving into his new home in Florida with his wife and three children, while on page 4, Joshua describes how he can move freely in his own home once again, a luxury many of us take for granted.

We also feature some of our volunteers, fundraisers, and Corporate Partners who are going above and beyond in their commitment to our mission by spreading awareness and enthusiastically championing our cause. We are fortunate to have so many dedicated supporters who are truly invested in our mission of Building Homes and Rebuilding Lives.

Thank you again for your continued support. The HFOT team continues to work diligently to get more deserving Veterans into homes. I encourage you to attend one of our build events near you and see for yourself how your support is changing lives.

Sincerely,

Tom Landwermeyer  
President/CEO  
Homes For Our Troops

SEPTEMBER 2023

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

### Stories that Inspire

- 3 9/11 Remembrance: Called to Serve SGT Brandon Rethmel
- 4 Freedom of Movement: Cpl Joshua Sust
- 5 Board Spotlight - Dan Fougere
- 6 How To Inspire Our Future Philanthropic Fundraisers!
- 7 9/11 Day of Service & Remembrance
- 7 Corporate Partners at AUSA 23
- 8 Spreading the Word: The Power of Advocacy for Homes For Our Troops



**ON THE COVER:**

Marine Cpl Joshua Sust at his Key Ceremony with HFOT President/CEO Tom Landwermeyer.



give.org



## A History of Excellence

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



## 9/11 Remembrance:

# Called to Serve



Brandon Rethmel was in his third-period Earth Science class when United Airlines Flight 175 struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center, the stunned expression on the faces of his fellow ninth graders mirroring his own as they watched the events unfold on the classroom television. Only thirty minutes from the Pentagon, Brandon remembers a feeling of fear as school was dismissed, and they were loaded onto buses, headed for the safety of home.

This fear morphed into something entirely different as they drove past Quantico, the Marine Corps base not far from his bus stop. *"I felt pride in my country. And anger because innocent people lost their lives,"* Brandon recalls. *"It didn't sit well with me."*

After high school, pride for his country and the memory of 9/11 led Brandon to the recruiter's office, where he enlisted in the Army. On June 21, 2009, Brandon, now a Sergeant with the 704th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, was serving as a motor transport operator in Afghanistan when a 107mm rocket hit his guard shack. Brandon lost his right leg and sustained severe arm injuries in the blast. He was evacuated to Walter Reed Medical Center, where he spent a year undergoing treatment.

Now medically retired and a stay-at-home father to 16-year-old Mariah, 12-year-old Trey, and 10-year-old Marcus, Brandon and his wife Sylvia, an ER nurse, are grateful to be future recipients of a specially adapted custom home. In his current multilevel residence, he cannot use his wheelchair, limiting his mobility. Brandon is looking forward to being able to move freely from room to room in a single-level, barrier-free environment.

*"Having an HFOT home will make my life better because this will be our forever home. No more doorways that aren't wheelchair accessible. No more stairs or carpet in the house. A home from HFOT will give me the opportunity to regain some of my independence,"* he says.

Originally from New York, Brandon is building his home in Florida, a place he considers "paradise".

Brandon says explaining how grateful he is to HFOT's donors and supporters is difficult because words don't fully capture his gratitude. *"I could say thank you, but it would not be enough — regaining my independence is everything to me."*



HFOT is building a home in Florida for SGT Brandon Rethmel, his wife Sylvia, and their children.



# Freedom of Movement

Motivated to enlist after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, serving his country was something Joshua Sust felt compelled to do. In 2006, after graduating high school, he joined the military. *"I joined the Marines to be part of the best. To be honest, I joined to go to war. I felt it was my duty to my country."*



Deployed three times in five years, Cpl Sust was serving with Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines on November 12, 2011, in Musa Quala, Afghanistan when his vehicle drove over a pressure plate improvised explosive device (IED). The blast ejected Josh from the vehicle, resulting in severe damage to his left leg, left arm, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and hearing loss.

For over three years, doctors attempted limb salvage on his left leg. In 2015, he made the life-changing decision to amputate it below the knee.

Adjusting to day-to-day life after surgery was challenging for Josh. Unable to use his wheelchair when his leg was sore in his non-adapted, multilevel house, he was forced to use crutches to rest and recover. This magnified the challenge of negotiating the stairs to his shower and laundry room.

A 2021 recipient of an HFOT specially adapted custom home, Josh says every part of his life has been positively impacted.

*"It gave me back my independence and peace of mind. Anyone that has an HFOT home knows exactly what that means—it's a game changer in everyday life. I can stay in my chair and still do the things I need to at home like laundry, cooking, and cleaning."*

Medically retired, Josh says the biggest gift his donated HFOT home has provided is the financial freedom to spend time with his family and the ability to give back to his mother and grandparents.

*"Without this home, I would not be able to host family events. We just celebrated my mom's 60th birthday, and I am lucky to still have both my grandparents. Without the financial burden of a mortgage, I can focus my time on them."*

Josh would like HFOT's donors and supporters to know their generosity is something he will never take for granted. He plans to pay it forward in every way he can.

*"Thank you for drastically changing my life and the lives of other Veterans who have received homes. You are giving us back our independence and self-worth. Freedom of movement is something we all take for granted. Imagine waking up every day and having to think about your next step—literally. If I step here, will I fall? How will I get in the shower? With an HFOT home, that never crosses my mind. It is almost normal again. I owe you all for making my life better."*



Cpl Joshua Sust received his home in Ohio at a Key Ceremony on June 5, 2021.





## BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

---

### Dan Fougere *Director*



*HFOT Board Director Dan Fougere and family  
with HFOT home recipient Cpl Roger Rua.*

Dan Fougere has spent nearly thirty years in the software industry, has been part of four IPOs, and most recently was Chief Revenue Officer of Datadog where he helped build and lead a team of nearly one thousand people, and grow annual revenue from \$60M to \$1B.

Prior to Datadog, Dan held global leadership roles at Medallia, led the NYC region for BladeLogic and BMC Software, and led the UKI team for Actuate while living in London.

In addition to Homes For Our Troops, Dan is also on the Board of Directors for the software companies Heap and Manta, advises many software CEOs and Founders, and runs his own investment firm, Shore Drive Capital.

Dan has a BS in Mechanical Engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and is married to Stephanie Fougere with whom he has three young children.

#### ***How did you find out about the organization?***

A few years ago, I wanted to give back to people in the military who have given so much to me, my family, and our country, so I did a search on the most well-run military charities. I found out that HFOT gives nearly 90 cents of every dollar spent to program services supporting Veterans, so that really got my interest.

#### ***What motivated you to become a member of the organization's Board of Directors?***

My family and I attended a build event, and not only did we make a donation, but my family got to know Cpl Roger Rua and his family, as well as helped landscape the home, so it was incredibly rewarding for me, my kids, and my wife—well beyond our expectations. Through that process of working with President/CEO Tom Landwermyer and Executive Director Bill Ivey, I was so impressed with their commitment to the mission and their phenomenal execution that I asked if I could get more involved.

#### ***What has been your most memorable moment with the organization?***

I attended the Veterans Conference in Foxboro, MA last November. Meeting the eight Veterans and their families from all over the country with such diverse backgrounds, and with such moving stories—that was certainly a memorable event.

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

One thing that really differentiates HFOT is that we spend very little on advertising, which makes it more challenging to get the word out, but also helps us to apply 90 cents of every dollar spent to the Veterans who need homes. But most important to me is the level of commitment and sacrifice from the staff who make all this magic happen. HFOT staff and leadership often work nights and weekends. There isn't anything they won't do to help the Veterans and their families. I am constantly inspired by these amazing people.

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

Our biggest challenge might be that we have a queue of severely injured Veterans who urgently need custom homes. Inflation has raised our costs, so we need more revenue to deliver the homes each year. Our Board is looking for more ways to get the word out. We're working to connect with more corporate partners and donors as well.

## How To Inspire Our Future Philanthropic Fundraisers!

As the school year begins, students are excited for a new year of learning and the opportunity to make a difference! Regardless of age, it's never too early to teach children and students about the benefits of giving back. There are many ways to FUNdraise for Homes For Our Troops—here are some ideas to start you off:



### Preschool:

Hold a lemonade stand—offer traditional or pink lemonade. Have a bake sale and choose a theme such as cupcakes or cookies.



### Elementary School:

Penny Wars! Have the different classes compete against each other OR hold a read-a-thon and encourage friends and family to pledge a dollar amount for the number of pages or books read.



### Middle School:

Host a Can & Bottle Drive, sell candy bars, or have a dance with ticket sales proceeds donated to Homes For Our Troops.



### High School:

Hold a car wash, raffle off items at a sporting event, or hold a walk-a-thon.



### College:

Host a cookout, barbecue, or casual dinner event for HFOT at your sorority/fraternity house or other college location. Charge an admittance or plate fee for those who attend. Arrange a year-long fundraiser and tailor our online fundraising platform to highlight your school.



Fundraising benefits students and communities. Kids and teens learn how to work together in support of a worthy cause. If you are interested in holding a fundraiser for Homes For Our Troops, please reach out to [ifundraising@hfotusa.org](mailto:ifundraising@hfotusa.org).

*Happy Learning and Happy FUNdraising!*

# 9/11 Day of Service & Remembrance

September 11th was established as a National Day of Service and Remembrance to encourage volunteering in tribute to victims, survivors, and those who risked their lives to save others. Homes For Our Troops is fortunate to have the commitment and support of dedicated volunteers who are inspired by the men and women who protect and serve our country.



## Dennis and A.B. DiLucente

Dennis and A.B. have volunteered at HFOT events since 2013, going above and beyond in various capacities. Dennis is a jack-of-all-trades handyman and A.B. lends a hand in administrative tasks such as registration. Volunteering with service-oriented organizations is a natural fit for the pair, both of whom had military careers. Dennis was an aviator in the Marine Corps while A.B. served in the Navy. They are particularly inspired by HFOT's mission.

*"We have the good fortune of being able to select from a wide collection of charities to support, and we feel particularly proud of HFOT due to their outstanding stewardship of donor dollars. We can recommend HFOT as a charity choice to others without any hesitation. Additionally, the core mission is incredibly rewarding—helping support our injured Veterans with a comfortable, accessible, and secure home."*

## Tera Trasher

A volunteer for over six years, Tera Thrasher wears many hats when she donates her time at HFOT events. She volunteers as the National Anthem singer, serves as an ASL Interpreter when deaf members are in attendance, and manages the Operation Lasting Support table on Volunteer Days, often pitching in to help with landscaping as well. She runs errands, picks up supplies, and helps with set up and tear down of events—basically, she's on board to help with anything anyone needs to show her appreciation and give back to those who served.

*"It is my responsibility to give back to those who sacrificed so much for my freedom. Homes For Our Troops' mission is inspiring because it gives Veterans an opportunity to find a new way to live without strain. It gives them their sanctuary back."*



## Corporate Partners at AUSA 2023

The role of Corporate Partners in our mission at HFOT is indispensable, and we strive to have face-to-face meetings every year to continuously develop our relationships and build new ones. We have the privilege of seeing our defense contractors at the Association of the United States Army's (AUSA) annual meeting and exposition every year in Washington, DC. AUSA "supports soldiers, their families, and Army civilians, provides a voice for the Army and honors those who have served."

This event affords us the opportunity to meet and mingle with numerous attendees, from all over the world, who are dedicated to learning the issues that are impacting today's Army, while thanking military members and Veterans for their service.

During this three-day Expo, we are honored to see current corporate partners such as CALIBRE Systems, who has supported us since 2014. Vice President of CALIBRE Systems, LTG (US Army Ret) Richard Formica, recently said this about supporting HFOT:

*"CALIBRE is proud to be a corporate sponsor of Homes For Our Troops. We are an employee-owned company – over 40 % of our employees are Veterans. Much of our work is dedicated to helping those who serve in the armed forces and our Veterans in transition. So, we value the role that HFOT plays in building homes and rebuilding lives for our severely injured Veterans and their families. We are very pleased to be a part of that noble cause. And we look forward each year to hosting our CALIBRE Golf Classic to raise money for HFOT. Thank you to HFOT for all that you do!"*

We are incredibly grateful for the support of our partners who attend this event every year, and more importantly, for their dedication to our United States Military. At the AUSA 2022 Expo, we had the privilege of attending a Mission Mingle hosted by L3Harris, which honored our Veterans, HFOT, and our mission of Building Homes and Rebuilding Lives. Because of their generosity, we were able to reach a wider audience during this fun Happy Hour, while raising awareness for the work we do nationwide.

We are already looking forward to seeing our friends at CALIBRE, L3Harris, Leonardo DRS, CAES, Lockheed Martin, Bell, Veterans United, and SRC again this year. We appreciate their continued support over the years, and we couldn't do what we do without them. Their commitment to our Veterans is priceless.

If you or your company would like to meet with Homes For Our Troops at this year's AUSA 2023 Expo, please email Victoria Weston at: [vweston@hfortusa.org](mailto:vweston@hfortusa.org)





## Spreading the Word: The Power of Advocacy for Homes For Our Troops

Homes For Our Troops (HFOT) relies on the support and advocacy of individuals to expand our network and make a life-changing impact on the Veterans we serve. By spreading the word and sharing a passion for helping Veterans, we all have the power to bring about positive change.

Leo and Trish Eineker are two individuals whose story is a testament to the impact that advocacy can have on the lives of our nation's Veterans.

Leo and Trish's initial introduction to HFOT stemmed from a chance encounter at a local café with two of HFOT's key supporters.

*"Trish and I were at a local café," Leo recalls. "While we were eating, the Rosedale Queens, Deb Kehoe and Kathi Skelton, recognized that I was a Vietnam Veteran. They invited us to participate in a Homes For Our Troops fundraising golf tournament at Rosedale Country Club. At the club, we met several current and future HFOT home recipients and their families, all of whom were Florida residents."*

The initial introduction at the café and the subsequent invitation to an HFOT event would lead Leo and Trish to become donors and passionate advocates for HFOT's mission. Both Leo and Trish come from families with a proud legacy of military service. It was only natural for them to connect with HFOT and dedicate themselves to supporting Veterans in need.

Leo served in combat in the Vietnam War as an Army Platoon Sergeant in the infantry. Leo's father was a combat infantryman in WWII, enlisting as a Private. He received a field commission and retired four years later as a Captain. Leo's uncles also served. One was a combat infantryman who died in Italy, and another was a Purple Heart recipient with the Marines at Iwo Jima. Trish's father was a Korean War Veteran.

Leo and Trish actively participate in HFOT events, volunteer to help landscape the homes, and joyfully witness the HFOT families in their community thrive and grow after receiving their specially adapted custom homes. When asked what sets HFOT apart, Leo and Trish shared their heartfelt perspective.

*"HFOT goes beyond the norm, making everyone, including donors, feel like part of the family. The staff, the Veterans, and their families remember us and make us feel genuinely appreciated. HFOT has a lasting impact on these Veterans and their families."*

Leo and Trish's story serves as a reminder of the profound effects of a simple conversation. The power to expand HFOT's network of support lies within each one of us. With a friendly smile and a genuine passion for helping Veterans, your advocacy can have a life-changing impact.

If you can, take a moment to tell a friend or two about HFOT. You never know the ripple effect a conversation can have in transforming the lives of our nation's Veterans.

Together, we can make a difference.

**THANK YOU to our Corporate Partners that continue to help restore freedom and independence to our nation's most severely injured post-9/11 Veterans.**

PLATINUM NATIONAL PARTNER



GOLD NATIONAL PARTNERS



SILVER NATIONAL PARTNERS



NATIONAL PARTNERS



MISSION PARTNERS



Companies, businesses, and corporations from all over our great nation are helping us to make a difference in the lives of our Veterans and their families. And you can too! For more information on how to become a Corporate Partner, please contact our Corporate Philanthropy Team at: [partnership@hfortusa.org](mailto:partnership@hfortusa.org)