Key Volunteer Spotlight:

Jim Tortorelli - Hillsdale, NJ

James Tortorelli, a Real Estate Broker with Coldwell Banker in Hillsdale, NJ first heard about Homes for Our Troops in 2006, when selling a home to a client. After learning that his client’s sister was looking for a handicapped accessible home for her son, Cpl. Visnu Gonzalez, a severely injured Marine, Jim knew he wanted to help in any way he could. Offering his assistance, it was quickly realized that a home to meet the needs of this young man would be far too costly for the family’s budget. In the meantime, Maria Elena Baez, Visnu’s mother, applied to Homes for Our Troops on her son’s behalf, and James agreed to assist with the land search. Once a lot was secured and James’ real estate expertise was no longer necessary, he knew he would continue to be an active member of the team supporting this project and American Hero.

Wearing multiple hats, James quickly assumed many of the Key Volunteer Roles for the Hillsdale, NJ project to build the specially adapted home for Cpl. Visnu Gonzalez. His expertise as a Community Liaison opened many doors as we planned for both the Groundbreaking and Community Dinner events. From searching for local venues to referrals for Porta Potty Rentals, James was the answer man! No request went unanswered and nothing was left undone when James was included in the planning!

Homes for Our Troops depends on the dedicated volunteerism of people like James Tortorelli. Would you like to learn more about becoming a Key Volunteer? Please visit www.homesforourtroops.org to learn more about the volunteer opportunities available in your area!

Upcoming Fundraisers & Events to Benefit Homes for Our Troops

NORTH CAROLINA
If you are looking for a challenge, this is the event to attend! The Semper Fi Challenge Series is a series of 3 events. The first is the Marine Buddy Challenge which happened on Feb 7th, 2009. The second is the Marine Ultimate Team Challenge in May in Charlotte, NC, and the third is the Marine Mud Challenge in Aug in Belmont, NC. See www.carolinamarines.org for more details and photos from last year’s event.

WISCONSIN
Milwaukee Firefighter Brian McNulty along with 11 fellow firefighters have been in training at Wisconsin Athletic Club and on March 11th will participate in running a relay on a treadmill for 24 continuous hours. Please visit www.homesforourtroops.org/goto/MFD12 for more information.

MASSACHUSETTS
St. Patrick’s Day Celebration at the Bridgewater Vet’s Club in Bridgewater, MA on Saturday, March 14th. Join them for a night of dancing, silent auction, raffles and more. For tickets & more information contact ToddRoach@removes.com.

TEXAS
On Saturday, April 4th, join the Lone Star Cowgirls Precision Riding Team at the Tomball VFW Post #2427 in Tomball, TX for a BBQ Dinner and Dancing. Contact Valerie Cranford at (281) 685-6355 for more information.

MASSACHUSETTS
SHHHH… On Friday, April 17th at the Marriott in Springfield, MA there will be a silent auction. For more information and to see some of the amazing items in the auction, see www.hfotauction.org

MASSACHUSETTS
Friday, April 18th – why not be part of something great! Cocktail reception and silent auction at the Montvale Plaza Ballroom in Stoneham, MA. Go to www.homesforourtroops.org/ providingfourtroops for additional information.

MASSACHUSETTS
SAVE THE DATE! Saturday, June 13th at the Marriott Copley in Boston, MA – plan to attend the Homes for Our Troops Third Annual Gala. Featuring the band Room Full of Blues, silent and live auctions as well as dinner and dancing – bring your dancing shoes!!

This Family Gives New Meaning to ‘Stretching a Buck’

In 2007, Matt Kosch, a senior at Mahwah High School decided one person could make a difference. His Dad, Kevin had recently read about a home built for SPC James Benoit in Wharton, NJ by Homes for Our Troops. Matt went straight to our website, “I realized that not only was labor needed but it obviously takes a lot of money to build these homes as well.” He was thinking big and approached the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Charles Montesano. Matt asked all students, not just in his own school, but in the Mahwah Public School System to bring in a dollar on Veteran’s Day. From this one thought came $3,720. “It just seems like the right thing to do; not everyone agrees with the current war, but as Americans we should all contribute and help each other. Homes for Our Troops helps their home-building project. It also gives them the opportunity to meet with other veterans and their families to share stories, get to know each other and just have fun!

Veterans’ Conferences

Homes for Our Troops has laid the groundwork to build many more homes in 2009 by recently holding two Veterans’ conferences where 11 more veterans and their families met with Homes for Our Troops personnel to begin planning their new homes.

These conferences allow the veterans to learn all about what will happen over the next months as Homes for Our Troops plans for a part of our mission in 2009.
Dear Friends,

February 4, 2009 marked a true milestone in our history. In September of 2008 Matt moved on to Villanova University but he wasn’t finished supporting Homes for Our Troops. He passed the torch to his younger sister, Kristin, a sophomore at Mahwah High School, giving her tips on how to improve on his original idea. Kristin did not take this project lightly. She drafted a solicitation letter for her school district which was then presented by Dr. Montesano to approximately 70 other school districts in Bergen County, New Jersey. Nine districts responded and participated and they have already received interest from several more for participation in 2009. They designated a ‘Jeans Day’ that would allow the teachers and staff to dress down for Veterans Day if they paid $5 toward the fundraiser.

In addition to fundraising at school, Kristin decided to place collection cans at a few local restaurants expecting to simply raise a few more dollars. She was unexpectedly contacted by an anonymous donor in town who gave $12,000. Kristin was overjoyed, as were her parents. An anonymous donor in town who gave $12,000 to the fundraiser.

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The design focuses on reducing energy consumption and is targeted to use 50% less energy than a home built to standard building codes. To achieve this goal the home will be built using Structural Insulated Panels or SIPs. While reducing energy consumption was the main focus, the design will also include features that improve air quality, reduce water consumption, decrease construction waste, and provide a beautiful drought resistant landscape.

For the second year in a row, hundreds of people came out to Homes for Our Troops’ annual sporting clays event in Fulshear, Texas. Thanks to the title sponsor - Energy Corporation of America - and the many other sponsors, volunteers, exhibitors and shooters, over $100,000 was raised to support our military men and women.

2nd Annual Sporting Clays Event a Great Success

A special thanks goes out to Carla Patton and Clark Clement, both employees of Energy Corporation of America, for spearheading the effort to put on this amazing event.
And mark your calendars! The 3rd annual event has been set for January 29 - 30, 2010.

2008 was a year of incredible success and support. We raised over $1.5 million to build homes for our heroes. We helped over 30 families and are looking forward to helping many more in the future.

Matt and Kristin’s incredible journey has continued and we are so grateful for all your support. We cannot have done this without your generosity and compassion.

We wish that every American could experience the emotions I feel when we turn homes over to our injured service members. My sister, Kristin, and I feel so grateful to be able to provide a home with no barriers in his way. To watch him be able to use technology like Structural Insulated Panels or SIPs.

To see him smile.

This is the spirit of the American people. Through your generosity we have been able to make our biggest commitment to date. In 2009 we have put a plan in place to take on 35 more home building projects. It is our hope that we will continue to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to support our mission.

I recently attended a groundbreaking ceremony for Corporal Visnu Gonzalez in New Jersey. In attendance was a high school student named Kristin Kosch from the Mahwah High School who got her whole school district involved in a fundraiser for Homes for Our Troops that raised $22,000. It is people like her and all of you that have allowed Homes for Our Troops to make a difference to so many injured service members.

Thank you everyone for believing in us and for helping us. But most of all thank you for supporting the greatest volunteers in the world. The men and women of the United States military.

With warmest regards

John F. Manktelow