VOICES OF VETERANS

On March 23, Caira Benson, wife of U.S. Army First Lieutenant Eric Benson, sat before the U.S. Senate Committee on Veteran’s Affairs and boldly shared her story as the caregiver of a veteran. A 2020 Operation Finally Home recipient, testified on Capitol Hill as part of hearings focused on improving the VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. While she was only able to speak briefly at the hearing, Caira had previously submitted more than 3,000 words of written testimony, detailing Eric’s traumatic injuries while serving in Iraq and recounting the many trials they had faced in obtaining support through the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC).

In order to make a difference in her husband’s life—and in the lives of other veterans—Caira had to be painfully vulnerable in her words to the committee. It was difficult, but worth it, she said.

“I prayed long and hard before entering the room. I knew it would hurt to put things out there, and it did. It was my vulnerability at its best. I can only hope that becoming so vulnerable will help others and make a difference.” —Caira Benson

Caira isn’t alone in her work as an advocate. She joins a number of Operation Finally Home recipients who are working to assist, support and advocate for veterans and their families. U.S. Air Force SSgt. David R. Veros Jr., who received a home from Operation Finally Home in 2016, currently serves as an alumni manager with Wounded Warrior Project. U.S. Army Major Eric King, who received a home in 2019, started his own nonprofit, VetsWhatsNext, to help and support veterans as they transition into civilian life. Jessica Cole (pictured left), an Operation Finally Home recipient along with her husband, U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Tyson Cole, recently played an instrumental role in creating a photography exhibit and veterans resource fair at the Menomonee Falls Library near their home in Wisconsin.

“At Operation Finally Home, we are blessed to honor veterans, first responders and their families with mortgage-free homes, transitional housing and home modifications,” said Rusty Carroll, President, Operation Finally Home. “Because of the passion and desire of our recipients, the generosity of our donors and partners creates a ripple effect that can have a far-reaching impact on the lives of veterans, first responders and their families.”
THANK YOU, LOWES!

A big thank you to Operation Finally Home partner Lowes Home Improvement for their help completing a home modification project in Bastrop, Texas, for retired U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Ronald Welch. The project included plumbing and wiring repairs as well as adding handrails and a ramp for accessibility and stability. Operation Finally Home is blessed with partners that help us fulfill our mission to help veterans, first responders and their families.

A FEW WORDS FROM DAN

As I look back over the past few years, I’m continually amazed by the impact Operation Finally Home has been able to have in the lives of America’s veterans, first responders and their families. We are incredibly blessed to play a role in honoring these deserving heroes.

Even as I reflect on the past, I am excited for the future of Operation Finally Home. Each year, we strive to increase our reach and grow our impact among military and first responder families in need. This issue of Homefront presents one of the best ways we can grow our impact and one of the best reasons I could make for supporting Operation Finally Home. This issue is focused on our veterans and all they do to help other veterans.

A mortgage-free home is an incredible gift, and many of our families over the years have recognized it as an incredible opportunity as well. It is certainly an opportunity to worry less and focus on one’s own life, family, and health. But many recipients have gone a step further and are using the opportunity to support and advocate for others.

The work of veterans like Caira Benson and Jessica Cole are highlighted in this issue. They are both great examples of how Operation Finally Home can grow its impact and how the contribution of a donor or partner goes further than just one family. The generosity we have all experienced over the years has had a ripple effect that changed lives far beyond the walls of any one home.

As we complete our 200th home this year, it is my challenge – our challenge – to ensure that every home recipient and every partner or donor understands that they play a vital role in making the world a better place for veterans and first responders in their communities and across the country.

I am humbled by the work we do at Operation Finally Home, and I am thankful for the opportunity to lead this great organization.

God Bless,

Dan Wallrath
Founder of Operation Finally Home

BEHIND THE BUILD: DAVID DREW

Operation Finally Home recently announced the appointment of David Drew to Senior Vice President of Operations. Drew previously served as a member of the Operation Finally Home Advisory Board. In this role, Drew provides leadership to all Operation Finally Home projects, including project budget development, management and execution and helps foster relationships with builders, contractors, suppliers and others who support the mission of Operation Finally Home. Drew brings more than 30 years of industry experience to the role, most recently serving as the Director of Product Development at MiTek. “I love the mission of Operation Finally Home and am excited to step into this role,” Drew said.

IN REMEMBRANCE

John Anthony (third from right) of Anthony Estate Homes and Anthony Orchards, a longtime partner of Operation Finally Home, passed away on May 5 in Granberry, Texas. In 2016, John, along with his wife and son, helped Operation Finally Home surprise U.S. Army Sgt. Diana Vasquez with the news she was receiving a mortgage-free home on national TV as part of FOX’s New Year’s Eve celebration in Times Square. Join us in praying for the Anthony family.
PILLAR EVENTS:
SURPRISES, GROUNDBREAKINGS, NOTES OF LOVE & DEDICATIONS

January 19  Danny Billek  Dedication  Bartow, FL
January 27  Ray Lopez  Dedication  Odessa, TX
February 14  Luisa Velez  Notes of Love  Irving, TX
February 18  Jason Plank  Dedication  Meridian, ID
February 18  Jacob Sanchez  Notes of Love  Pharr, TX
February 23  J.A. Recer  Dedication  McKinney, TX
March 2  Jonathan Stephenson  Dedication  New Braunfels, TX
March 2  Daniel Holt  Notes of Love  Melissa, TX
March 8  Peter Way  Surprise  Martinez, GA
April 8  Nathan Rodriguez  Notes of Love  Melissa, TX
May 11  Aaron Cabrera  Groundbreaking  Liberty Hill, TX
“Day 1 of many with my new running legs and it went well! I made it like 150 meters (track!) before my first stop. Besides that, I’m feeling very strong, fam!”

– U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Joseph James

Joseph is celebrating his return to running after getting new prosthetic legs that allow him to enjoy the sport again. In September 2015, Operation Finally Home and Goodall Homes partnered to provide James and his family a place to call home in Hendersonville, Tennessee.

HERE TO HELP
Would you or someone you know benefit from a mortgage-free home, transitional housing or a home modification? The Operation Finally Home process begins with our initial contact forms. Please check them out at operationfinallyhome.org/apply.
Thank you to everyone who joined us in leaving Notes of Love for U.S. Marine Corps SSgt Nathan Rodriguez and his family! Special thanks to Ashton Woods Homes and MA Partners in making this project possible. Read Nathan’s story here: https://www.operationfinallyhome.org/the-rodriguez-family

Happy anniversary to U.S. Army Major Eric King! In 2018 we joined the City of Irving, Copeland, NEC Corporation of America, Dallas Builders Association, and Winston Custom Homes in handing over the keys!

We love breaking ground on new homes for our heroes!
Students involved in the Big Heroes, Tiny Homes project of the Humble Independent School District (Texas) continue their work constructing tiny homes for veterans. The project involves high school students at three district schools: Kingwood High School, Kingwood Park High School and Summer Creek High School. Earlier this month, Operation Finally Home representatives joined students at Kingwood Park and Summer Creek to dedicate the tiny homes the students built. The goal is to provide student-built tiny homes for homeless veterans in the Houston area. Learn more at humbleisd.net/bigheroestinyhomes.

BIG SHOT SHOOT OUT

The annual Big Shot Shoot Out took place on March 31 at The Range of Richfield in Richfield, Wisconsin.

SPORTING CLAYS SHOOT

On Feb. 28, participants gathered in Houston to take part in the sixth annual 2022 Sporting Clay Shoot benefiting Operation Finally Home. The event raised funds in support of Operation Finally Home’s mission.

FINAL THOUGHT

If you make your business about helping others, you will always have plenty of work.

— Chris Guillebeau, author and entrepreneur