

# OP FH HOME FRONT

2024 // SPRING

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR OUR SUPPORTERS

## CELEBRATING FRIENDS & FAMILY

Good fences make good neighbors, the old saying says, but if the experience of several Operation Finally Home recipients tells us anything about good neighbors, there's a little more to it.

Take U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Tyson Cole and U.S. Army Sergeant Daniel Cappo, for example. Cole and his family live next door to the Cappo family in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, and the relationship they've built is less like neighbors and more like brothers.

"I consider Dan Cappo my battle buddy," Cole said. "He always plows our driveway after every snowstorm, will remind me to get trash out, walks over to chat and takes the time to make sure I'm doing OK. I'm grateful to Dan, and, God knows, the world would be a beautiful place if everyone had a neighbor like him."

It's a sentiment Cappo shares. "We've been able to talk about our pasts in the military and share stories," Cappo said. "I just know, without a doubt, that we'll always be there for each other."

Experiencing this kind of camaraderie and support isn't unusual for Operation Finally Home recipients. In various locations across the country, several recipient families live in the same neighborhoods, and the proximity to others who understand the unique experiences and needs of veteran families is a valuable benefit.

"Other veterans understand each other—our quirks and special needs," said Andrea Barreiro. She and her husband, U.S. Army Sergeant Major Jose Barreiro, moved into their home in Bartow, Florida, last year. Their neighbors include the Benson and Billek families, "You can just sit together and have that unspoken understanding of what each other is going through."



*The Billeks, Barreiros and Bensons break ground in Bartow, FL*

Credit: Lennar Orlando



*Menomonee Falls, WI - Several of our families joined in for the Cole's Groundbreaking.*

Credit: Belman Homes



*Bartow, FL - The Benson family joins the Billeks at their Groundbreaking.*

Credit: Lennar Orlando

These shared experiences have created an unbreakable bond, many of these Operation Finally Home friends and neighbors say. From borrowing a lawn mower to helping get kids to school, these families know they're never alone.

"When Jose had surgery, we were there saying, 'What do you need?'" said Caira Benson, wife of U.S. Army First Lieutenant Eric Benson. "It's really a community."

Cultivating community is at the core of what we do at Operation Finally Home, and these friends and neighbors are living examples of why the work we do is so important.





## A FEW WORDS FROM DAN

Warmer weather often means spending more time with family and friends. From vacations to celebrations and cook-outs to hikes, I love to see our Operation Finally Home families enjoying their homes and the freedom a mortgage-free or modified home has provided. Honoring America's veterans, first responders and their families is a blessing, and I am so grateful for the work we get to do.

For me, one of the highlights of any Surprise, Groundbreaking, Notes of Love or Dedication event is when our previous recipients come to welcome new families. It's heartening to see recipients, partners, donors and supporters banding together to encourage each other, and it's one of the things I love most about our mission and work.

That's why this issue is so special to me. From our staff members to our donors, recipients to partners and everyone who comes alongside us to make our mission possible, Operation Finally Home is a family. No matter the circumstances, we encourage and support each other. We share each other's sorrows and joys—and that's what we're celebrating in this issue. We're showcasing stories of Operation Finally Home recipients who are neighbors but have become more like family. You'll also get a chance to meet recipient families who continue to serve their community and their country, celebrate spring and catch up on all the ways our dedicated donors, partners and supporters have come together to make it possible for us to fulfill our mission.

The work we do truly matters, and each newsletter is a reminder and an encouragement that together we can make a difference in the lives of America's heroes. Thank you for all you do to honor our deserving veterans, first responders and their families by giving them a safe place to call home.

God Bless,

Dan Wallrath

Founder of Operation Finally Home

## FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS

While their service experiences are unique, many Operation Finally Home recipients say they feel connected, understood and validated when they're around other veterans, first responders and their families. Here's what a few of these friends and neighbors had to say about the support system receiving a home has helped them create.



Ronnie, Andrea, Bob, Luisa and Phil at Lelea Surprise

"Every time I see Major (King) and his family, either by the house or in town, it's like seeing family. We might not get to see each other every day, but there is always a kind word, hug or care. It's a club of a few, but hearts as big as Texas!"

—U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman Third Class Luisa Velez, who lives in Irving, Texas, near U.S. Army Major Eric King and his family



Philip Olson, Daniel Cappo and Tyson Cole with their kids and Operation Finally Home Founder Dan Wallrath at Daniel Cappo's Surprise.

"Living close to someone who understands what you've dealt with as a veteran can be incredibly comforting and supportive. It provides a unique sense of camaraderie and connection, as you both have shared experiences and can empathize with each other's struggles and triumphs."

—U.S. Army Sergeant Daniel Cappo, who lives next door to U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Tyson Cole in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin



The Barreiro family at the groundbreaking for their home in Bartow, Florida.

"We do potlucks, help each other with big tasks, watch each other's kiddos and fur babies and are just there for each other. We've really bonded with our neighbors, and we couldn't be more blessed."

—Andrea Barreiro, wife of U.S. Army Sergeant Major Jose Barreiro

## CONGRATULATIONS, MAJOR KING!



"I've recently gotten married and now my house is a home and complete."

—U.S. Army Major Eric K. King





"Johnny Walker" along with his wife and the build team celebrate at the Walker's Surprise and Groundbreaking in Mabank, Texas.



Credit: City of Mabank



Retired U.S. Army SFC John Neeley sees his modified home in Shelbyville, Tennessee, for the first time, alongside family, friends and volunteers. (Gail Builders)



Credit: ForFuel Creative



U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Samasoni Lelea and his wife participate in their Notes of Love event virtually from Alaska. The Leleas' new home is under construction Irving, Texas. (Garvey Homes, Dallas Builders Association, City of Irving and NEC)

Credit: City of Irving

## PILLAR EVENTS:

SURPRISES, GROUNDBREAKINGS,  
NOTES OF LOVE & DEDICATIONS

March 14	"Johnnie Walker"	Surprise/Groundbreaking	Mabank, Texas
March 20	John Neeley	Welcome Home/Modification	Shelbyville, Tennessee
March 20	Samasoni Lelea	Notes of Love	Irving, Texas
May 7	Kingwood Park Tiny Homes	Dedication	Houston, Texas
May 16	Joanna Ellenbeck	Dedication	Willis, Texas
May 17	Summer Creek Tiny Homes	Dedication	Houston, Texas

## A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

Our friends at Lowe's Home Improvement played a vital role in helping Gail Builders update the home of U.S. Veteran John Neeley in Shelbyville, Tennessee. The renovations and updates are designed to make the home more wheelchair accessible, and we hosted a volunteer days on February 15 and March 20 to help move furnishings out then back in. Thank you to the team at Lowe's for your support!



Lowe's employees at Volunteer Day on Feb. 15, part of the modification project at U.S. Veteran John Neeley's home in Shelbyville, Tennessee.



# CELEBRATING SPRING



Jantz Family - Watauga, Texas



Frewerd Family - Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin



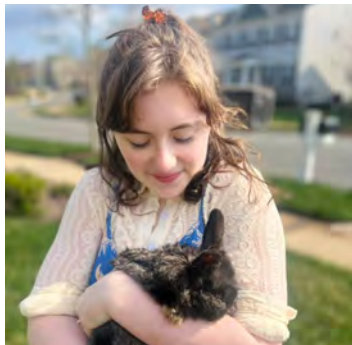
Billek Family - Bartow, Florida



Mikeska Family - Summerville, South Carolina



Cervantes Family - Round Rock, Texas



Goodrich Family - Stafford, Virginia



Fisher Family - Myrtle Beach, South Carolina



Cervantes Family - Round Rock, Texas



Goodrich Family - Stafford, Virginia


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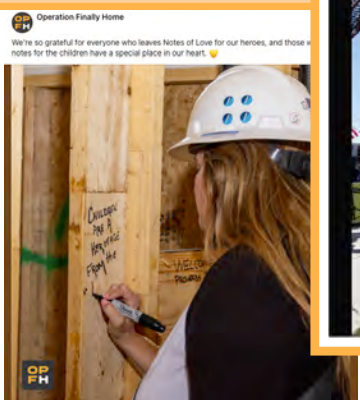
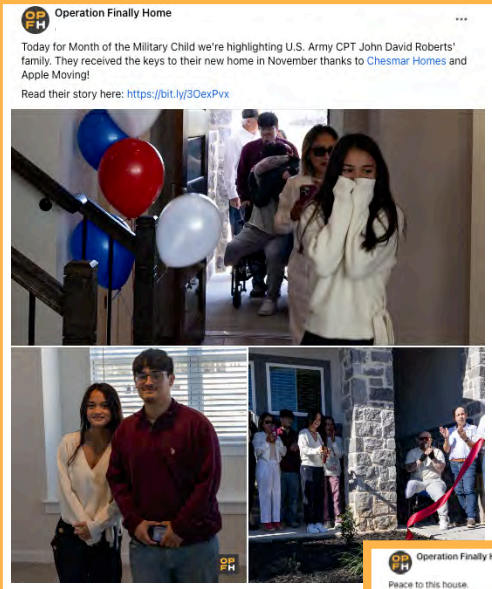
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# FACES, PLACES & SPACES

## THANK YOU, MAC TRAILERS & CRAIG MORGAN!

MAC Trailer selected Operation Finally Home as the charity beneficiary at the 2024 MAC Trailer World Nationals Pulling Championship, held March 21-23 in Louisville, Kentucky. At the event, MAC Trailer and Craig Morgan honored Operation Finally Home with a \$100,000 donation. Thank you for making our mission of honoring veterans, first responders and their families possible!



Credit: Craig Morgan

## TINY HOME UPDATE

Amy Pierce with LP Building Solutions recently visited Humble ISD's Summer Creek High School's Big Heroes, Tiny Homes program and was pleasantly surprised by the students and their passion for helping veterans. She's shown here with Gaby, a senior at Summer Creek High School who served as the project manager for the year, and some of her team.



Credit: Operation Finally Home

## BIG SHOT SHOOTOUT

The annual Big Shot Shootout took place on March 21 at the Range of Richfield in Richfield, Wisconsin. The annual event, which raises funds to support the mission and work of Operation Finally Home, included food, fun, prizes and an auction, all focused on supporting veterans and first responders.



## A TEAM EFFORT

Thanks to the diligent work and effort of some amazing volunteers in Corpus Christi, Texas, the Padre Island Business Association recently presented Operation Finally Home with a \$10,000 donation as part of their Barefoot Mardi Gras event. Volunteers Laurisa Baklik and Frank Stanley are shown here, accepting the check on Operation Finally Home's behalf. Thank you to our volunteers who make our work possible!



Credit: Padre Island Business Association

## MAKING MUSICAL MEMORIES

A trip to the Florida Strawberry Festival to see Craig Morgan in concert recently turned into a lifetime memory for the Barreiro family. Their daughter made a homemade sign to get Craig's attention from the stage, and it worked! Craig mentioned the family from stage and took a few moments to meet with them and take a photo after the concert. We're so thankful for Craig's continued support of Operation Finally Home and our mission.



## 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](https://operationfinallyhome.org/apply).

## FINAL THOUGHT

There is nothing in the world as good as good neighbors.

— Laura Ingalls Wilder, author

Visit [OperationFinallyHome.org](https://OperationFinallyHome.org) or call 615-732-6143 to help a hero!