Together as a nation, we have been uprooted from our sense of normalcy as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. While some battle illness, others experience employment changes and many stay home in an effort to flatten the curve, having a safe and comfortable home has never been more important. Operation FINALLY HOME heroes are sharing their experiences while sheltering in their mortgage-free homes.

**Savannah Howes, wife of U.S. Army Specialist Heath Howes**

*St. Louis, Missouri*

We are so grateful to have a safe haven from the pandemic. In order to reduce the risk of our family contracting the virus, we stay home. We regularly wipe down door knobs, handles and surfaces with disinfectant. Our family has made so many great memories with game nights, movie nights, lots of baking, grilling on the fire pit, walks and bike rides through our beautiful subdivision. Although circumstances are not ideal right now, we are so blessed to spend quality time together as a family in the comfort of our own home.

**U.S. Army Sergeant Howard Appleby**

*Babcock Ranch, Florida*

My wife and the kids are currently doing homeschooling and we are all adjusting to this new way of society. It’s not easy but with my experiences and training in the military, we have created a sense of living with balance in our lives. Adequate rest and sleep to rejuvenate our mind and body is essential. Quarantine just gives us more time to really think about tomorrow. Everything and everyone is important in life, and we should also appreciate the little things in life. We can’t stay at home and keep complaining about the things that we don’t have control over but we can at least think about the things that we do have control over; our mind and body. It’s time to adjust the mind to this way of life. Take a walk around the outside of your house, clean the house twice, do some landscaping or just call a friend and say hi.

**U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Tyson Cole**

*Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin*

For veterans with PTSD and TBI, stress compounds our symptoms. Doesn’t matter if the stress is happy (like going to a Brewers game), or negative by nature (like the COVID-19 quarantine). You can’t avoid stress because it is ever present in our daily lives. That’s what is so amazing about a home from Operation FINALLY HOME. My home comes with the additional blessings of reducing the stressors I was facing a year ago. The stress of being stretched thin from countless house repairs and barely making ends meet, while the thought of becoming homeless lingered in the back of my mind. Our home removed all those stresses, allowing me to focus on the stresses of living. Doing homework as a family, cooking dinner, or playing games. Life continues to provide challenges. Our current COVID-19 situation is unsettling and will leave us all changed in many ways. The one thing we can do for certain is be grateful for the love around us, extend kindness to people in need and send heartfelt prayers to those determined to save American lives.
A SPIRIT OF HOPE

From our build partners, to our employees to the veterans and families we serve, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused stress and uncertainty for all. Especially for those suffering from combat-related conditions such as PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury, relying on healthy coping mechanisms are hugely important. The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs has accumulated resources and recommendations to help veterans cope with stress and improve wellbeing, though these mechanisms are great resources for anyone feeling increased anxiety during this time. For more information and resources, visit www.ptsd.va.gov.

Increase Sense of Safety
Anxiety can be reduced with healthy actions that make you feel safer. Good hygiene habits limit the risk of infection, including washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, covering your mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and disinfecting household objects frequently.

Cultivate Calm
It is understandable to feel anxious and worried when many aspects of life are changing, though calming activities can help offset those feelings. Slow, steady breathing, muscle relaxation and any other actions that are calming for you (yoga, exercise, music, keeping the mind occupied) can help.

Control and Endure
Modifying your definition of a ‘good day,’ setting achievable goals and accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you regain control and establish a new normal routine.

Remain Hopeful
Focusing on the long-term perspective, viewing the situation as an opportunity to build strengths celebrating successes and doing things you enjoy can help you stay positive and hopeful.

Stay Connected
Seeking support from family, friends, mentors and those who are in similar circumstances can help ease anxiety. Remember, your Operation FINALLY HOME family is always here to support you.

OFF STAFF SPOTLIGHT: GARY AND LANA HENLEY
Operation FINALLY HOME Board Members

Gary and Lana Henley, owners of Henley Homes, Inc. and longtime Operation FINALLY HOME board members, were recently awarded the Building Hope award from Southern Living for the fourth time. The award is given annually to a member of the Southern Living Custom Homebuilder program, and was awarded for the Henley’s work on homes for two Operation FINALLY HOME heroes: U.S. Army Staff Sergeant and Austin Police Officer Tammy Barrett and WWII veteran Ralph Ellis. We are proud to have the support of Gary and Lana as we continue to build homes for heroes. Congratulations!
PILLAR EVENTS

PILLAR EVENTS: SURPRISES, GROUNDBREAKINGS, NOTES OF LOVE & DEDICATIONS

February 1  
Surprise  
**U.S. Marine Corps SGT Aaron Zurn**  
Dayton, OH

February 11  
Surprise  
**U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Cory Hixson**  
Bluffton, SC

February 13  
Groundbreaking  
**U.S. Army SFC Justin Reuber**  
Houston, TX

February 28  
Notes of Love  
**U.S. Army SGT Daniel Cappo**  
Menomonee Falls, WI

March 11  
Surprise  
**U.S. Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Russell Snodgrass**  
Lubbock, TX

March 11  
Notes of Love  
**U.S. Army SFC Justin Reuber**  
Houston, TX

March 13  
Dedication  
**U.S. Army SFC Vaitogi Taetuli**  
Liberty Hill, TX

March 20  
Dedication  
**U.S. Army SGT Julio Martinez**  
Corpus Christi, TX
SPRING FUN

“\textbf{I love living in my home! My room is awesome and I go to a great school with my friends!}”

– Natalie Veros

How Are Our Heroes?

Celebrating their big surprise! – Hixson Family, Conway, AR (Brett Franks Construction/Southern Living)

Spreading joy – Goodrich Family, Stafford, VA (Miller & Smith)

Congratulations on the hole-in-one! – Whitmore Family – Myrtle Beach, SC (PulteGroup Built to Honor)

Self-isolation fun. – Kadleck Family – The Woodlands, TX (Beazer)

The Sweger and Appleby Families connected at a retreat.

Veros Family – Jacksonville, FL (PulteGroup Built to Honor)
Operation Finally Home

We have a few more photos from our recent surprise for U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Cory Hixson and family with Bret Franks Construction, Inc. at the Southern Living Summit this week!

FOLLOW US!
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Social Corner

Operation Finally Home

Life takes you places, love brings you home.

Operation Finally Home

There’s something beautiful about a little snow on the ground when you know it’s going to be the site of the future home of a veteran.

Operation Finally Home

Jen Wallrath joined U.S. Army SFC Tyson Cole and Jessica Cole at the Lowe’s Home Improvement in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, to make some selections for their new home. Thank you to store manager John Huebner for the help!

Operation Finally Home

May all roads lead you home.

Operation Finally Home

Find joy in your journey but may all roads lead you home.
LOWE’S DONATES SHED TO HERO

Lowe’s Home Improvement continues to support Operation FINALLY HOME on build projects and renovations nationwide. Recently, Lowe’s representatives donated and installed a shed for Operation FINALLY HOME hero U.S. Marine Corps Corporal Miguel Simental and his family.

ATTACKED AT HOME – A GREEN BERET’S SURVIVAL STORY OF THE FORT HOOD SHOOTING

Operation FINAL HOME hero U.S. Army Captain John Arroyo was shot in the throat and neck during a shooting on base in Fort Hood, Texas, on April 2, 2014. He recounts his John’s life, his journey to the military and his continued recovery. The book is available for purchase on Amazon.com.

OPERATION FINALLY HOME CELEBRATES 15TH ANNIVERSARY

Operation FINALLY HOME representatives attended the International Builders Show in Las Vegas in January to share their mission with build partners. In celebration of the 15th anniversary, Operation FINALLY HOME hosted a concert with ambassador Craig Morgan for industry partners.

OPERATION ROCK THE HOUSE FEATURED AMBASSADOR CRAIG MORGAN

In partnership with Belman Homes, Operation FINALLY HOME hosted Operation ROCK THE HOUSE, a benefit concert headlined by ambassador Craig Morgan. Proceeds from the concert will benefit projects to provide mortgage-free homes and home modifications in Wisconsin.

GHBA CELEBRATES 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF BENEFIT HOMES PROJECT

The Greater Houston Builders Association is celebrating the 40th anniversary of its Benefit Homes Project. The project builds and sells quality homes, and profit proceeds are donated to local charities. Operation FINALLY HOME is grateful for their ongoing support!

FINAL THOUGHT:

“There’s nothing more important than a good, safe, secure home.”

– Rosalynn Carter

Visit OperationFINALLYHOME.org or call 615-732-6143 to help a hero!