



Foundations

A Newsletter from Homes For Our Troops - September 2021

20 Years Later:

Remembering 9/11

Marine Cpl Daniel Lasko
Future HFOT Home Recipient

A Letter from the President/CEO

Twenty years ago, our country changed forever when terrorists hijacked planes and flew them into the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. These horrific acts, intended to diminish the American spirit, did not shatter our country, but galvanized its resolve to defend freedom from these attacks.



From the ashes of these tragic events, brave men and women rose up, motivated to protect and defend their nation and its people. They felt compelled to serve and joined the military – some right out of high school, others reenlisting after having been out of the military for years. For the Veterans we serve at Homes For Our Troops, this decision changed the course of their lives forever – they returned home with injuries so severe their lifestyles were permanently changed.

In this 20th Anniversary of 9/11 Remembrance newsletter, we will introduce you to a few of our current and future Veteran home recipients, and share how the 9/11 attacks influenced their decisions to serve. You will find that, despite the injuries they sustained, these Veterans remain proud of their service and sacrifice.

Twenty years later, there are still over 1,000 severely injured post-9/11 Veterans in need of adapted housing, many of whom were injured early on in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Homes For Our Troops will continue to build homes until every Veteran who qualifies for a specially adapted custom home receives one.

I want to thank you for your generosity over the years. Our donors and supporters still emulate the fierce patriotism felt across the nation in the days and weeks following the attacks. We are grateful that you are committed to making sure the men and women who served our country are never forgotten, and cared for when they return home.

Sincerely,

Tom Landwermer
President/CEO
Homes For Our Troops

September 2021

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ON THE COVER: HFOT will be building a home for Marine Cpl Daniel Lasko and his family in Pennsylvania.

NEVER FORGET



A History of Excellence

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

BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Sergeant (USMC, Retired) Adam Kisielewski

Following the 9/11 attacks, Adam Kisielewski expedited his high school graduation and joined the US Marine Corps in early 2002. In 2005, Adam deployed to Iraq as an infantry squad leader with the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines. Just over a month into his deployment, Adam was severely injured by an improvised explosive device (IED). Adam's wounds required the amputation of his left arm and his right leg.

Currently, Adam works full-time as the President of NPLB Outdoors – a 501(c)(3) organization that helps wounded, injured and ill Veterans through a variety of outdoor activities and outings. Since his retirement from the Marines, Adam earned a bachelor's degree from Mount St. Mary's University and a master's degree from Georgetown University.

Adam proudly serves on the Board of Directors for Homes For Our Troops, and was instrumental in establishing our Veterans Action and Advisory Team (VAAT) to provide peer support to injured Veterans.

How did the 9/11 terrorist attacks impact your decision to serve and your career path? I was in high school when the 9/11 attacks occurred and it ratified my decision to join the Marine Corps and serve my country. I couldn't have possibly anticipated it would have led me to where I am now, but I wouldn't change a thing about my decision to serve or my career path since.

Reflecting on the 20th Anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, why do you think it's important for Americans to still support nonprofits that serve injured Veterans like Homes For Our Troops? Our Veterans stood up when our country asked them to do so. Many of them paid the ultimate price, and many more sacrificed dearly. Supporting charities like HFOT is a great way for all Americans to get involved and show our Veterans we care about them and the sacrifices they made. It's why I will always give my time and treasure to worthy charities, and hope you will too.

Why is HFOT's mission important to you? HFOT made a life-changing difference for me and my family. Prior to being selected to receive our home, every day was a struggle. From crawling around on the floor and up and down stairs to trying not to fall climbing in and out of a shower that I barely fit my shower chair in, physical challenges were everywhere. It became emotionally challenging knowing that I couldn't get to my son quickly to help when he needed it, and knowing my injuries put added burdens onto my wife.

What motivated you to become a member of the organization's Board of Directors? I have been blessed so many times since being injured. My family and I have had many opportunities to do things we never would have thought possible – pursuing an education, meeting incredible people, taking on passions like flying and riding motorcycles, and even traveling the globe. I wanted to promote some of the same good outcomes I had to Veterans joining the program after me. We are where we are only because of the thoughtful and generous people around us. Serving on the Board of Directors is one small way to help others around me.

What would you say to encourage others to get involved with HFOT's mission? For the past 10 years, I have been a proud volunteer and donor for the organization. I have always gotten more out than I ever put in, and I think that's true for almost everyone who gets involved. It is incredibly humbling to be a part of HFOT, and you will know the difference you make when you attend your first Key Ceremony.

How does our organization differ from other charities you've worked with in the past? I have worked with many wonderful charities but HFOT is at the top because they stay with Veterans for the rest of their life. They don't just hand over keys to a home and roll out. They stay in regular contact with the Veterans they serve. They help coordinate services with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as needed. They work with financial planners to help home recipients prepare for lifelong success.

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

HFOT has built 319 homes, but there are still hundreds and possibly thousands of Veterans that need one. With building costs rising, and suitable property becoming harder and harder to secure, the Board is regularly trying to help the organization find the resources needed to build these specially adapted custom homes. But it's a team effort and everyone can help make HFOT's mission a reality.



Called to Serve

After the September 11th terrorist attacks, brave men and women rose to defend their country by joining or re-enlisting in the military. Here we share some of their moving stories.



HFOT home recipient Army Corporal Joshua Stein

The 9/11 attacks played a big part in Joshua Stein's desire to serve. He enlisted after graduating high school in 2004. *"I was so upset that it jump-started my military career. As soon as I could join and get*

everything taken care of, I was on the next bus out of Oklahoma," he says.

Joshua joined the Army as a combat engineer with Echo Company, 1-66th Armor, 4th Infantry Division, going on his first deployment to Iraq in 2005. In April 2006, he lost both legs and sustained severe injuries to both his arms during an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion.

Looking back on the time since the 9/11 attacks, Joshua says it is still just as fresh and heartbreaking as it was 20 years ago. *"It's hard to believe it was that long ago and how we were just kids."*

Joshua says Americans can honor and remember the 9/11 terrorist attacks by giving back to organizations like HFOT that support post-9/11 Veterans. In 2010, Joshua and his family received their specially adapted custom HFOT home in Texas, and they have been rebuilding their lives ever since. *"We have had the freedom to finish school, grow our family, and figure out where to go from here,"* he says. *"It's still important for Americans to donate because there are still Veterans out there who deserve to live this freely and independently. A handful of organizations have truly changed my life after injury, and HFOT is one of them. America said we'd never forget; supporting organizations like HFOT shows that we never will."*



Read more stories about our Veterans at
www.hfotusa.org/rebuilding-lives



Future HFOT home recipient Marine Corporal Daniel Lasko

Corporal Daniel Lasko signed up to join the Marines right out of high school. He was sworn in on the morning of September 11, 2001.

"We watched a plane crash into the World Trade Center, and I was like 'This is it. This is my calling,'"

he says. "I was already committed to serve, but it gave me more purpose and drive to ensure I served my country with pride."

On April 24, 2004, Cpl Lasko was on a reconnaissance mission with the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit in Afghanistan, when he lost his left leg and sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) from an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion.

Twenty years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, they still resonate with him. *"It was life-changing, and my heart is still with all those we lost, and the brave men and women who stepped up to help during and after the attacks. There will always be a special bond between those who served our communities during and after these tragic events that changed our nation forever."*

Cpl Lasko says it is still important to support organizations that serve Veterans injured in post-9/11 conflicts. *"Their injuries are permanent and will be with them for their lifetime. As we get older, we encounter new challenges, and support from our fellow Americans is appreciated."*

Dan says his HFOT home will give his family peace of mind and enable them to look forward. Once settled in the home, Dan plans to get more involved with his community, in particular with dog rescue organizations.



Read more about Dan's story at www.hfotusa.org/lasko

Future HFOT home recipient Army Sergeant Noe “Lito” Santos Dilone

September 11, 2001 was a defining moment in Noe “Lito” Santos Dilone’s life. When terrorists flew planes into the World Trade Center, Lito was a high school senior living only a few miles away in Queens, N.Y. *“We got ourselves a front-row seat to one of worst events you could ever imagine.”*

Lito had a perfect view of the twin towers from his bedroom and his high school. In the days following the attacks, Lito recalls the jarring sight of thick clouds of dust and debris looming overhead in place of where the dual skyscrapers used to be. Even two decades later, the ominous image is still with him. *“That day is still ingrained in my memory. It’s one of those things that doesn’t go away,”* he says.

Witnessing the horrific events unfold so close to home motivated Lito to protect his country. He always considered joining the military, but 9/11 cemented his decision to serve. After graduating high school, he enlisted as a mechanic with the 3rd Infantry Division, and deployed to Iraq in January 2005. *“It was a big push for me to finally make that decision to join.”*

Nine months into Lito’s first combat deployment, he was serving as the lead gunner of a convoy with the Division’s Personal Security Team in Baghdad. It was during this mission that his vehicle drove over multiple improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Lito lost his left leg at the hip and sustained hearing loss.

Lito notes that though it has been 20 years since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Veterans injured in post-9/11 wars will be coping with their injuries for the rest of their lives. Lito was injured over 15 years ago and has been living in non-adapted housing ever since, forcing him to use crutches to move around his current home. He is grateful HFOT will be building him a specially adapted custom home where he will be able to use his wheelchair. *“HFOT is building a better and secure future for our nation’s injured Veterans. It means a lot that there’s a group of people who are thinking of our well-being.”*

**Read more about Lito’s story at
www.hfotusa.org/dilone**



“That day is still ingrained in my memory. It’s one of those things that doesn’t go away.”

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 joined the service in response to the attacks. Homes For Our Troops is fortunate to have the commitment and support from dedicated volunteers who are inspired by the men and women who protect and serve our country.



Ron Cole and Senior HFOT Community Engagement Coordinator Mell Barbosa.

Ron Cole

Vietnam Veteran Ron Cole has been a loyal volunteer at HFOT's California events for several years, often donating his photography talents. After attending a few events, he was completely dedicated to the mission. Since 2017, Ron has photographed over 25 build events and taken over 3,000 pictures.

"The Veterans are true heroes, and the sacrifices they have made are so impressive. I'm always amazed at their positive attitudes and how they're upstanding citizens. I want to give back and help these Veterans get in their homes and share their stories."

Irma Ramos

Irma Ramos has been volunteering at HFOT build events in Texas since the fall of 2019. She does everything from buying items, to setting up, to speaking about the importance of volunteering, to facilitating Volunteer Days in Texas when HFOT staff is unavailable.

"HFOT means the world to me! It's an organization that I love being a part of because they give back to our injured Veterans who put their lives on the line so we can still be a country with freedom. I can never do or say enough to show every single one of them how thankful I am for them. I know they bleed red, white, and blue, and I will forever do so as well."

Logan Smith

Logan Smith has volunteered at almost every HFOT build event in the San Antonio and Houston areas since the fall of 2019. He is usually responsible for setting up all the banners, flags, bio boards, and heavy items. Logan often helps out the Community Engagement Coordinators by picking up extra supplies like ice or water. One time he even convinced an Army-Navy store to open an hour early so he could get an Army flag for a build event.

"The men and women who protect the freedoms we enjoy in the U.S.A. deserve utmost respect and support. HFOT is the perfect conduit for providing this support because they allow donors to not only contribute financially, but the grassroots nature of the organization provides the community the opportunity to attend events, and show their appreciation to our Veterans by doing the work on the ground, such as setting up for Key Ceremonies and landscaping Veterans' homes. That is why I choose to give my time and money to HFOT, because it provides me with the opportunity to get out there, meet these heroic post-9/11 Veterans, and look them in the eye and thank them for the sacrifices they have made for our worthy country and way of life. As has been said at many HFOT events, this isn't charity; this is a moral obligation."



Logan Smith and Irma Ramos



1. Future HFOT home recipient Navy HN Joel Booth (right)
2. Future HFOT home recipient Army SPC Johnny Nguyen
3. HFOT home recipient Army SSG Christopher Gordon
4. HFOT home recipient Marine LCpl John Curtin
5. Future HFOT home recipient Army CW2 Rebecca Mann
6. HFOT home recipient Air Force SSgt Keith Sekora
7. HFOT home recipient Army SGT David Guzman
8. HFOT home recipient Marine Cpl Joshua Sust

Honoring their *Service & Sacrifice*

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, thousands of brave men and women were motivated to enlist in the military. They joined to protect our freedoms and to guard our country against future attacks, knowing the risks and consequences. We honor their courage, service, and sacrifice.



Cindy McGinty

Cindy McGinty lost her husband, Mike, during the attacks on the World Trade Center, and honors her husband's memory as a member of HFOT's monthly giving program, Operation Lasting Support (OLS). Mike was a Veteran, graduating from the United States Naval Academy in 1981, and served until 1989 as a Lieutenant Commander.

Cindy says that the terrorist attacks on 9/11 were an attempt to tear our country apart, but she feels that our nation's service members proudly stood up to this evil, and Americans have collectively responded with simple acts of human kindness. Her commitment to HFOT's mission is a way for her to do the same. *"It is important that we continue to show that they did not win,"* she says.



Jennifer Lynn Kane

Jennifer Lynn Kane was only 26 years old when she lost her life in the September 11th attacks. She was working on the 100th floor of the North Tower in the World Trade Center when the first plane hit.

To honor their daughter's memory, Jennifer's parents George and Faye Kane, founded the Jennifer Kane Scholarship and Charitable Trust, which supports philanthropic causes that make a positive impact, just as Jennifer did during her life. Since 2007, the Trust has awarded HFOT over \$270,000.

Jennifer grew up in Plymouth, Massachusetts, just a few towns over from the HFOT headquarters in Taunton. Her parents say she was very patriotic and always thought of other people first. She earned her bachelor's degree in accounting from Villanova University before becoming a CPA for Marsh & McClellan at the World Trade Center. One of Jennifer's coworkers said she was a mentor to all new employees, and he considered her to be the big sister he never had.

Homes For Our Troops continues to honor Jennifer's memory and her legacy will continue through the organization's mission.

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.

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