

Blue Knights join Home for our Troops to help disabled Marines & Blue Knights attend Key Ceremony for disabled Veteran

Story by Michael Wagner

Photos by Michael Wagner and Niqui LaViolette

On February 17, 2024 Blue Knight Alex Cross and I volunteered to help landscape the future homes of two disabled Marines.



PFC Williamson home

Most of these Veterans have sustained injuries, including multiple limb amputations, partial or full paralysis, and/or severe traumatic brain injury (TBI). These homes help restore some of the freedom and independence our Veterans sacrificed while defending our country, and enables them to focus on their family, recovery and rebuilding their lives.

The homes were being donated by Homes For Our Troops (HFOT), a publicly funded 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization. They build and donate specially adapted custom homes nationwide for severely injured post 9/11 Veterans, to enable them to rebuild their lives.



Sgt. Esquibel home



Volunteers at work

During this event there were over 150 volunteers; 75 volunteers landscaped Private First Class (PFC) Jesse Williamson's home and the other 75 volunteers landscaped Sergeant Dominic Esquibel's home. The event started around 10:00 a.m. and ended around 12:45 p.m. and was coordinated by Niqui La Violette, Community Engagement Coordinator for Homes For Our Troops.

I have participated in numerous charity events throughout my lifetime; but this was one of the most fulfilling and heartwarming. Being able to help these two disabled Marines made all the difference. We are taking care of our disabled Veterans for all the sacrifices they have made.



PFC Williamson and Niqui LaViolette volunteers

When the 150 volunteers stood at each home for the raising of the Home For Our Troops flag, it was so electrifying and exciting. It brought back memories of my 20 years in the United States Marine Corps where I had participated in numerous parades and ceremonies.



PFC Williamson addressing

Note: There is no picture of Sgt. Dominic Esquibel because he is a private person and wishes to remain so. When the volunteers stood in line at his home waiting to eat lunch he walked by and personally shook the hand of each volunteer.



Flag raising ceremony at the end of the project

Key Ceremony for Sgt. Esquibel

On February 24, 2024 Blue Knight Blue Knight Alex Cross and I, along with George Christensen joined again with Home For Our Troops to in an Key Ceremony at the home for disabled Veteran Dominic Esquibel in Fallbrook, California. George Christensen is the Commander of American Legion Post 146 located in Oceanside, California. Mike Wagner is a member of this Veteran organization too.

The Key Ceremony is where the keys to a new home are given to the home owners so they can move in. Bill Ivey from HFOT presented an electronic key fob to Sergeant Esquibel and his wife.



Alex Cross, Ms. Goroshko & Mike

This event was coordinated by Krystina Goroshko who is a Community Engagement Coordinator for Home For Our Troops Organization. According to Krystina, Homes For Our Troops has completed building 374 customs adapted homes for disabled Veterans in 45 States. Forty seven homes have been completed in California and 8 homes are currently being built in the State. Eighty two homes are in the process of being built throughout the United States.

This event was just as fulfilling and heartwarming as the landscaping event which occurred on February 17, 2024 at the homes of both Marines homes: SGT. Dominic Esquibel and PFC Jesse Williamson.



BK Cross, Cmdr. Christensen, BK Wagner

Numerous volunteers who participated in the landscaping event were present. Additionally, other disabled Veterans who live in the same neighborhood were at this key ceremony along with their families.

There were numerous guest speakers. One of the guest speakers was Bill Ivey, Executive Director for Homes For Our Troops Organization. He gave a very touching and emotional speech. He not only talked about his personal relationship with Sergeant Dominic Esquibel and his wife, Joanna who is from Poland and has a PHD in Linguistics, but also explained how the organization (HFOT) considers each disabled Veteran a member of the organization's family and keeps in touch with each disabled Veteran family to ensure all their needs are taken care of.

The last speaker was Sergeant Dominic Esquibel. He gave a very personal and touching speech.

Here is a little bio on Sergeant Dominic Esquibel.

He has always been driven by a life of service. This guiding principle motivated him to enlist in the United States Marine Corps as an Infantryman to defend his country after the attack of 9/11.

He first deployed to Iraq in 2004 with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, serving in Anbar Province. After training his Marines of Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines for operations in Afghanistan, he deployed with them to that theater. On March 25, 2011 while leading his squad in Sangin District, Helmand Province, Sergeant Esquibel stepped on an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), sustaining severe damage to his right leg, a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and injuries to his shoulder and back.

After eight years of limb salvage to his right leg and re-injuring it again in 2012, Esquibel agreed to have doctors amputate his leg below his knee. Medically retired Esquibel wears his prosthetic most of the time but is finding it progressively more challenging to move around his non-accessible home.

Receiving a 2800 square foot home on an acre + of land specially adapted custom home from Homes For Our Troops (HFOT) with an open floor plan, pull down shelves, and other safety features mitigates the issues mentioned above.

It was a pleasure and honor to represent the Blue Knights and the American Legion Post 146 at these events.



Respectfully Submitted
Michael Wagner, Secretary