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In a hurry to help a wounded Marine

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By RUSTY DENNEN

It wasn't your typical construction crew: men, women and children, skilled and unskilled, in white hard hats and brown T-shirts.

But at Lot 6, 52 Ashburn Hills Lane yesterday morning, they were all focused on one thing--building Marine Sgt. Steven Kiernan's house in a hurry.

Homes for Our Troops and Atlantic Builders, a local contractor, are working together to have the 2,600-square-foot house up and ready for drywall by tomorrow afternoon.

About 150 people, mostly volunteers and skilled tradesmen gathered at the lot off U.S. 17 in Stafford County yesterday morning as Kiernan arrived with a motorcycle escort.

Among the helpers were neighbors Gina and Marcus Narvaez and their daughters, Emily, 9, and Amy, 6.

"We just moved in the house on the corner. We were taking the kids for a walk and we saw the [Homes for Our Troops] signs," Gina said.

They called and found out that the nonprofit organization was holding one of its weekend Build Brigades down the street, and they wanted to help, passing out flyers in the neighborhood.

"We're working to make this a home for him, not just a house," she said. Marcus served in the Marines for 13 years; both now work as government contractors.

Atlantic Builders agreed to be the general contractor for the project and gathered electricians, plumbers, framers, roofers and other



Volunteers sign a banner for Sgt. Steven Kiernan as construction continues on a home for the wounded Marine.



Workers with Atlantic Builders and Homes for Our Troops put a wall in place at a house being constructed for Sgt. Steven Kiernan in Stafford yesterday. Kiernan lost both legs to a bomb while serving with the Marines in Iraq.

skilled workers--all of whom are donating their labor.

Chet Cary, owner of CC Carpentry in Stafford, said he wouldn't have missed it.

"We have a warm spot in our hearts for all soldiers. I want to be part of helping [Kiernan] get on his feet."

Cary's son, John, who has been deployed to the war zone twice, serves in the Army in Texas.

Jake Cornwell, owner of Southern Spotsylvania Plumbing, and his son, Jimmy, were also ready to work.

"We're all for it," Jake Cornwell said. "We do other stuff with wounded veterans. We'll do whatever it takes. About 10 of us will be here in the morning."

He added, "No one in the family that I know of has been in the military. I guess you could say we're the home support."

Kiernan, 22, grew up in California. He joined the Marines at 17 and was selected for duty at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland. His next stop was Camp Lejeune, N.C.; he was deployed to Iraq in March 2008.

On patrol in Fallujah, Iraq, in 2008, he and his squad were hit by an improvised explosive device. He lost both legs at the knee and still has shrapnel in his body.

He's receiving treatment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, where he was fitted with prosthetic legs. He hopes to be released from the Marine Corps soon on medical disability.

Kiernan heard about Homes for Our Troops from another Marine who was getting a house built through the program.

He was selected and chose the lot in Ashburn Hills. He'll move in soon, mortgage-free, with his friend and roommate, Kenny Lyon. Lyon, 25, is a retired Marine who lost a leg in combat near Fallujah in Iraq.

Kiernan, whose family lives in California, said he's grateful for the house and for all those pitching in.

"All these people took the time to come here. They took time off work and time away from their families to show support for the troops. It's great."

Time, labor and materials were donated by dozens of companies. Among larger donations was the Semper Fi Fund, which pledged \$25,000 toward the project.

John Epperly, an Army National Guard colonel who lives across the street, offered up his yard as a staging area.



Sgt. Steven Kiernan, who was injured in Iraq, is getting a new home in a Stafford County subdivision.

"It's a feel-good day to have a neighbor coming into the community. It's good to have him here, and I'm looking forward to becoming his friend."

Rusty Dennen: 540/374-5431

Email: rdennen@freelancestar.com

Homes for Our Troops, a nonprofit based in Taunton, Mass., assists severely injured service members and veterans by raising money, gathering building materials and enlisting professional labor. It coordinates the construction of new homes, or adapts existing ones, for handicapped accessibility.

homesforourtroops.org

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