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Coming Full Circle: Operation **FINALLY**  
HOME Returns to League City, Texas,  
to Honor 100th Home

Operation **FINALLY** HOME | Houston, Texas





# Coming Full Circle: Operation FINALLY HOME Returns to League City, Texas, to Honor 100th Home

By Rusty Carroll, Executive Director of Operation FINALLY HOME





As Operation FINALLY HOME joined the League City community at our 100th home dedication on April 14, 2016, we couldn't believe that we were standing in the same city that started it all. With homes in 23 states, it seemed like good fortune that our 100th home would end up in League City.

But while standing in front of U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Jonathan Dowdell's new home on that beautiful spring day, looking at the faces of both old and new friends during this momentous milestone, we felt that it was meant to be. Surrounded by many of the builders and community members that began the journey with us more than 10 years ago, we were able to reflect on our humble beginnings and thank God for how far we've come.



Our story began in League City in 2005 when Dan Wallrath, our founder and president, was working as a custom homebuilder. He was approached by a friend of the family of Steven Schultz, a retired U.S. Marine Lance Cpl., who was severely injured both physically and mentally during his years in the military. Partially paralyzed and half blind, Steven was unable to perform everyday tasks in his family's home. He faced the possibility of living in a nursing home, but his parents wanted him to live in the comfort of his own home.

Once Dan learned of Steven, a wounded war hero limited by his injuries and circumstances, he knew he needed to act. Dan reached out to the Bay Area Builders Association and started the process of making the Schultz home accessible for Steven's needs. The remodel allowed Steven to start transitioning to his new life and begin



the healing process. Witnessing how significantly the changes to the home improved the morale of Steven and all those involved in the build, Dan realized he had found his calling.

Since founding Operation FINALLY HOME, 181 homes have been built or are in the planning stages in 32 states, helping more than 113 members of the military and

their families settle down in a home that will help them focus on their futures. This incredible work could not be possible without the support and resources of our local builders, builder associations, sponsors, developers and communities across the country.

We're blessed to have started our journey in Houston, where a group of selfless builders heard our call and





showed the rest of America what's possible when your heart is in the cause. With every home built, our message spreads and encourages new communities to come forward to assist our wounded military heroes in a permanent and impactful way—lifting the financial burden of a mortgage.

Lifting this financial burden for an individual or family is a decision Operation FINALLY HOME takes seriously, guided through prayer and careful consideration. When U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Jonathan Dowdell's application came across our desk, we knew that this American hero deserved the blessing of a mortgage-free home. A Purple Heart recipient, Jonathan was severely injured in an IED blast while on deployment to Afghanistan. Following the explosion, Jonathan suffered the above-knee amputation of both legs, amputation of his left index finger and right arm deformity as a result of a forearm contracture. Due to his injuries, Jonathan required a home that would be wheelchair accessible, and his current apartment didn't meet his needs.

Operation FINALLY HOME immediately started the application process for this deserving veteran, and in April 2014, Jonathan and his family were surprised with the announcement that they would receive a new custom-

built, mortgage-free home during League City's first annual Salute to Heroes: A Patriot Dinner.

About two years later, the Dowdells prepared to see their completed mortgage-free home for the first time at a special welcome home ceremony. Jonathan was excited to see some of his buddies that he served with as well as his close friend Sgt. Major Daniel Krause, the brave hero who saved Jonathan's life in Afghanistan.

In addition to the hundreds of supporters on site, the ceremony was broadcast over Operation FINALLY HOME's social media channels and has been viewed over 7,000 times, allowing friends, family and supporters the chance to watch the dedication from afar. The messages poured in from people across the country congratulating the Dowdells and thanking Jonathan for his service. After the ceremony, the Dowdells were led into their new home to see the completed project—a fully furnished home built to meet their specific needs. Jonathan was most thankful for the wheelchair-accessible entries and modified bathroom, which he says has made a world of difference in his mobility compared to his apartment.

When asked about the most impactful aspects of the Operation FINALLY HOME program, Jonathan cites his





new-found community. In addition to the stability that comes with a mortgage-free home, he is now part of the Operation FINALLY HOME family. We are committed to supporting Jonathan through the healing process and helping to build lifelong relationships. On top of joining us for annual fishing and hunting trips with fellow veterans, he and his daughter had the opportunity to meet Taylor Swift with backstage concert passes.

Since moving into his new home, Jonathan has been getting to know his new neighbors, many of whom have dropped by to thank him for his service as well as to offer baked goods and recommendations for doctors and dentists in the community. Jonathan recently discovered that one of his neighbors is a Vietnam Purple Heart veteran who also served in the 7th Marine regiment.

Jonathan's experience proves that the healing process doesn't stop with just a home. These wounded soldiers need to feel the camaraderie of their peers in order to make the transition to civilian life. Jonathan can now live worry-free, knowing that his family is taken care. After years of moving around in the military, leaving belongings and memories behind with each house, this is the chance for military families to settle down and form real bonds with their neighbors and community.

As we look to the future, we anticipate reaching the goal of a 100 new homes annually. This goal is something we can achieve with the support of our builders and generous donors. We also intend to shine a light on the unseen injuries of our veterans— post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), which are just as devastating as physical injuries but don't often get the attention they deserve. These men and women have experienced traumas that we can't begin to understand, and they need just as much support to heal and integrate back into civilian life as other wounded soldiers. We'll continue working on identifying these heroes and making sure they have every opportunity from us to move forward with their lives.




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*For more information and to learn how you can get involved with a build in your area, visit [www.OperationFinallyHome.org](http://www.OperationFinallyHome.org) or call me at 615-979-9988. You may also follow the organization at [Facebook.com/OperationFinallyHome](https://www.facebook.com/OperationFinallyHome), Twitter at @OpFinallyHome or Instagram @OperationFinallyHome.*