

[Additional features](#)

Operation Finally Home surprises second Wisconsin veteran



Nov. 07, 2015

[0 Comments](#)

By J.A. Berger

Nov. 07, 2015

When the Milwaukee Bucks made their way through the tunnel and onto the floor to play against the Washington Wizards on October 30, 2015, the players and fans anticipated a fun night of basketball. At the end of the first quarter, U.S. Army Specialist Robert “Bo” Kitelinger along with his wife, Kim, and their three children came through the tunnel, too. “I thought Operation Finally Home invited us to the game so I could do some interviews with the press,” Kitelinger said. Once they reached the floor, the next two and half minutes left Kitelinger speechless and his wife fighting back tears. A video was playing on the Jumbotron above the court. “I saw photos of me in my uniform. It was such a surprise. We weren’t sure exactly what was happening.” The Kitelingers were being gifted a mortgage-free home through Operation Finally Home, thanks to the expertise, commitment and generosity of Belman Homes, Tim O’Brien Homes, Neumann Companies and Structural Building Components Association.

This year, Operation Finally Home is celebrating 10 years of providing custom-built, mortgage-free homes to America’s military heroes and the widows of the fallen who have given the full measure. Operation Finally Home partners with corporate sponsors, builder associations, builders, developers, individual contributors, and volunteers to help America’s veterans and their families transition to the home front by addressing one of their most pressing needs: a home.

Kitelinger is the second veteran to receive a mortgage-free home in Wisconsin through Operation Finally Home. “We are glad Operation Finally Home is in Wisconsin,” said David Belman of Belman Homes. “It took some time to gain some steam, but we are now getting great support from the trades and the community.”

Serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, Kitelinger has been awarded numerous commendations during his nearly 11 years of service, including a Purple Heart, an Afghanistan Campaign Medal with a star and Iraq Campaign Medal with four stars. He was deployed to Kuwait in August 2005, where his platoon was tasked to provide security for the Explosive Ordnance Disposal team stationed in Mahmudiyah. While attempting to secure the area during a routine mission for an improvised explosive device (IED) call, an IED suddenly knocked Kitelinger unconscious and severely injured several members of his team. As a result of the incident, Kitelinger was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. He continued his military duty, re-enlisting in 2006 as a wheeled vehicle mechanic and eventually deploying to Afghanistan in

2008. Kitelinger's military career ended when he medically retired in July 2014. His injuries not only cut short his plans to serve 20 years in the Army, but also altered his life forever.

"For soldiers who plan on a career in the military, it's a shock when they can no longer serve," Belman said. "They are left wondering what to do with the rest of their lives. They served our country protecting our freedoms. A mortgage-free home gives them the freedom to live their lives."

Kitelinger is currently enrolled at Marquette University, earning a degree in biochemistry and molecular biology. He plans to attend medical school with the goal of practicing sports medicine. "It's not only about what service personnel have done in the military; it's about what they will do going forward," Belman said.

The builders group of Belman, O'Brien and Neumann has marshaled resources to build a second mortgage-free home for Operation Finally Home in Wisconsin. "Builders are the best people," said Molly Halliday of Operation Finally Home. "Our goal is to build homes in every state. So far, we are in 29 states, we have dedicated 92 homes and we have another 60 homes in various stages of the building process."

Halliday said veterans come home with a myriad of issues from wounds sustained in the line of duty. "Invisible wounds are a challenge, such as the one Bo has. Medications tend to make patients feel hot, so rooms need special cooling units."

Belman agreed. "When we are building a home for someone with physical challenges, we make tangible changes. For Bo, we are making adjustments to address his needs." The home being built in the Village of Jackson for the Kitelingers will have a soundproof master bedroom and room-darkening shades, serving as a quiet room for Kitelinger, who suffers from migraine headaches. The home is scheduled for occupancy by February 2016.

"It is an honor for our team to be involved in Operation Finally Home," said Tim O'Brien of Tim O'Brien Homes. "The support from the building industry has been overwhelming and illustrates our industry's dedication to our veterans who have put their lives on hold to protect the freedoms we have all come to enjoy."

Operation Finally Home reaches out to caseworkers of injured veterans to help with nominations and paperwork. The nominated veterans are then reviewed by the Operation Finally Home panel of civilians and military personnel. "The caseworker in Wisconsin singled out Bo," Halliday said. "The chosen soldier, of course, never feels deserving and always feels some other veteran should get the home."

Since returning home, Kitelinger's service hasn't diminished, only changed. He is the president and founder of the Marquette University Student Veterans Association, which partners with the VA in support of veterans' mental health issues. He volunteers at the VA and lends his time as a referee with a youth soccer league, teaching children good sportsmanship and respect for others. He is a lifetime member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

Kitelinger and his wife, Kim, have three children: Aaron, 13, Julianna, 5 and Elizabeth, 2. "With the new house, the kids won't have to share a bedroom," Kitelinger said. "We are so grateful and humbled by all this. There are other veterans who are more deserving."

Matt Neumann of the Neumann Companies didn't quite agree. "The freedoms we all experience as Americans are what this project is all about. Giving back to our veterans through this family, for their dedication and sacrifice for our freedoms, is a small token of gratitude."

Find this article at:

<http://archive.jsonline.com/homes/additionalfeatures/341025492.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.