

RAISING THE ROOF

Community Rallies To Help One of Its Own

By Eloise D. Morano

Sergeant Dale Beatty of Statesville certainly didn't envision the way life turned out. But his upbeat, can-do attitude transforms everyone he touches, especially the army of homebuilders and contractors that have volunteered to build him a house.

Beatty is remarkably unselfconscious for a young man who lost the lower half of both legs to anti-tank mines in Iraq. The Humvee he was riding in was literally blown sky-high, and Beatty figures it was the armored floor and the grace of God that kept him alive.

"But you know, I'm still who I was before," says Beatty with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "I just thank God I'm alive," he says as he prepares to begin sawing some lumber in what will be his new home. He has specially adapted, prosthetic lower legs, and he moves with enviable energy and grace.

He says he worries more about some of the injured vets he got to know at Walter Reed Army Hospital, where he ended up Stateside, bedridden for longer than he cares to dwell on. "I worry much more about the guys with traumatic brain injuries, or the ones on respirators. I'm the fortunate one," he says.

His new, accessible home is framed and roofed, and stands in the middle of a field that was originally part of his parents' property. His mom and dad made a gift of the land to Dale and his wife, Belinda. They have two little boys, Lucas, 2, and Dustin, 4. The home will be brick, with 2-stories and a full basement.

Besides sweat equity, Belinda and Dale have invested everything they have in this project. The rest of what it takes to build is being donated by a very real army of suppliers, all mustered and lined up by the Iredell County Home Builders Association (ICHBA). Its executive officer, Bunny Boyd, is the one who first saw a news item about Beatty's injuries, and thought building him a house would make a

great community project - along the lines of an old-fashioned barn-raising.

“The first thing Dale said to me was, he didn’t want charity,” she says. “But I pointed out to him this isn’t charity. This is community helping each other,” says Bunny. She credits Dale’s church, Monticello United Methodist, with starting the whole thing by collecting funds to help the Beatty’s.

“But who better to build him a house than an entire association of experienced home builders? The most expensive part is the labor and we have the best volunteers on the planet,” she says. As she’s saying this, she is looking up at her husband, Richard Boyd, climbing around in the rafters. He’s Chief Field Inspector for Iredell County, and teaches electrical work in 5 states. Bunny says her husband got all his inspectors to come out to the house one night to put up the walls of the basement. They did it because her husband asked.

Another constant volunteer is Jan Petree, First Vice-President of the Iredell County Homebuilders Association. “Jan is supposed to be home building his own house,” says Bunny. “But instead, he’s helping out here today.

“In a way, I really hesitate to single out volunteers, since we have such a huge list of people who have helped. I don’t want to leave anyone out! We put out a call to the members of ICHBA, and the response has been incredible. We have had such an outpouring of donations, too, ranging from all the brick, marble, granite, hardwood flooring, even a storage building. Fat Boys has even furnished a lunch one Saturday,” says Bunny. “Okay, for example, I took Belinda to pick her granite for the kitchen, and while we were there, I asked, ‘Can you do her a marble fireplace?’ And they said, ‘We’d be glad to.’ ”

Dale, who is sawing lumber, works on his house every day, along with his father, Jerry, and uncle, Norman Beatty. They are brothers who don’t claim to be builders but say they “grew up doing carpentry.” Today, they are climbing up and down ladders, measuring and hammering.

ICHBA is looking forward to showing off the Beatty home in their fall Parade of Homes, starting in late September. Their goal is to show what a community working together can do.

As you might imagine, Dale himself is moved and amazed by the outpouring of help and generosity. He would like this to set a precedent for other areas of the country. He is haunted by the thought of the men who are injured and have nowhere to go, and he is not the only one.

While Dale was at Walter Reed, he had a visit from a woman named Cindy McGrew, who runs a non-profit website (www.operationsecondchance.org) whose purpose is to provide returning service people with the networking to find the help they need.

“It’s hard to find out who needs help. That’s why what she does is so important,” says Dale. “I want people to go to her site and support what she does.”

McGrew certainly homed in on one of Dale’s first needs, mundane as it was: “When she visited me at Walter Reed, I had a sheet spread out on the floor so my sons could play on it. The next day, when she visited, she brought us a Portacrib! Isn’t that great?” says Dale.

What he says he wants most is to help injured service people go home – and have a place to call home when they get there; one that can accommodate whatever their injury happens to be.

“Any community across the nation could do the same thing we are doing here,” says Dale, “and I hope they do. I pray they do.”



To help with the Beatty House project, contact Bunny Boyd at 704.881.0535 (ICHBA's offices) You can track progress on the Beatty house by logging on to:
www.iredellhomebuilders.com