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RIBA's Builders Helping Heroes charity

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"We are more than happy to do this, and to welcome Cpl. Kevin Dubois to our community!"

That was the word from Nancy Binns, president of the Burrillville town council, on March 13th as the council agreed unanimously to waive all fees in the construction process for a house to be built for a wounded Afghan War veteran. The 2,650 s/f, specially adapted home is to be built this year by the Rhode Island Builders Association's Builders Helping Heroes (BHH) charity and its partner, Homes for Our Troops (HFOT).

The council meeting was attended by RIBA president Felix Carlone, BHH president Robert Baldwin, HFOT property transfer manager John Silvia, member Vincent Marcantonio and executive director John Marcantonio.

Baldwin, Silvia and John Marcantonio each addressed the council to request the waiver, explaining the project in detail.

The only question came from Councilman Wallace Lees, who stressed that he was not against the waiver, but wondered who would take care of the property after the Dubois family moved in. Silvia explained that HFOT has a thorough follow-up program that assists disabled veterans with property upkeep and many other tasks.

In his remarks to the council, Baldwin summed it up. "It's not a matter of can you approve this waiver, it's how can you not."

Council members agreed.

HFOT, based in Taunton, Mass., has acquired a two-acre lot on Sherman Farm Road, and BHH will be the general contractor of record. Baldwin, of R.B. Homes Inc., is handling scheduling and arrangements for subcontractors from land clearing through site work and the foundation, with BHH director and RIBA secretary David Caldwell Jr. of Caldwell and Johnson Inc. as site manager.

Caldwell is himself a Marine Corps veteran of the Gulf War.

Cpl. Dubois, a native of Lincoln, lost both legs at the hip while on his second deployment in Afghanistan. Most recently he has been in San Diego, Calif., for rehabilitation.

The project is already under way, with the homesite having been staked out on April 1st by DiPrete Engineering Associates, a RIBA member that is donating site plan and septic system design services.

"Having a specially adapted home will benefit me greatly because it will help improve my daily living challenges," Cpl. Dubois was quoted as saying. "It will improve my life overall, making me more independent, and it will give me a better quality of life. Thank you for supporting me!"

Cpl. Dubois and his wife, Kayla, visited the building site, still in the process of being cleared, to review site plans with Baldwin on April 10th. He told The Rhode Island Builder Report that the Town of Burrillville is welcoming them with open arms.

"The (Harrisville) fire department put on a dinner for us, and local school children have sent cards

welcoming us to town. It's wonderful," Cpl. Dubois said.

With project costs expected to be about \$400,000, Caldwell said that donations of time, materials and money are needed.

"Our fundraising goal is \$100,000, and we have received commitments from RIBA members and vendors for approximately \$300,000 worth of labor and materials," he stated.

BHH is a fully IRS approved, non-profit subsidiary of RIBA, and all donations are tax deductible. BHH also is a registered Rhode Island residential contractor (#19).

Along with DiPrete Engineering Associates, other members who have agreed to contribute include Jonathan Dember and Robert Sherwood of Conservation Services Group, who will contribute the consultation on "green" building so that the house conforms with Energy Star® requirements and the National Association of Home Builders Green Building Standard.

BuilderTREND is donating project management software, and more national vendors are expected to sign on, according to Caldwell, who added that well-drilling services and an office trailer for the project are still needed.

"Along with the tax deduction, anyone donating to the project will be entitled to use the 'Proud sponsor, Builders Helping Heroes' logo," he said.

Members will be able to follow the progress of the project through monthly updates in The Rhode Island Builder Report and online at www.buildershelpingheroes.org.

Cash donations are needed and may be made online at www.homesforourtroops.org/dubois.

Paul Eno is the owner and editor-in-chief of New River Press, Woonsocket and is the editor of the monthly RIBA newsletter, The Rhode Island Builder Report.