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## An army of volunteers helps build home for disabled soldier's family

By *JIM McCONVILLE*  
STAFF WRITER

Soon, Army Staff Sgt. Michael Minard finally will have his own bed to sleep in.

Minard, his wife, Lynda, and their two children will take ownership of their new house next week. The one-story, 2,400-square-foot ranch was built by Homes For Our Troops, with the help of countless volunteers around the state.

The four-bedroom house, now in the final touch-up stage for its grand opening, is a roughly four-month labor of love that began Aug. 18.

For Minard, it's been a long and painful two-year journey since he was injured in Iraq.

Minard was on his third tour in Iraq in October 2007 when his legs were severely injured by an improvised explosive device detonated in the Sadr City section of Baghdad by the Stryker armored vehicle he was riding in.

Minard eventually was transported to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. He awoke in the hospital to find that his legs had been amputated above the knee as a result of the explosion.

Now nearly two years later, Minard finds himself perpetually stunned by the kindness of volunteers, many of them strangers, who have donated their time or money to help build his house, which is completely handicapped accessible, inside and out.

"This is amazing — the support from so many people and so many organizations," said Minard, 28, who came by early Monday morning as a dozen or so workers put the final touches on the outside of the beige-colored house.

"There's people who've come from all around New Jersey to help," Minard said. "I've got a great community that I'm moving into, and I live in a great state where there's lots of camaraderie."

### Many lend a hand

Since the August groundbreaking, workers — both skilled craftsmen and those who just wanted to roll up their sleeves and provide some elbow grease — have shown up at 413 Beachview Ave. to lend a hand, said Jack Clancy, manager of Keyport Fishery, who organized several fundraisers for Minard earlier this year.

Many of the volunteers are unemployed trades workers from the surrounding area.

"A lot of these guys are laid-off union workers or between jobs, and they'll give up their time," said Jack McNaboe, volunteer construction superintendent for the Sgt. Minard home project.

Other local volunteers said there wasn't a second of hesitation that they would chip in when they

learned of the project.

"The common man is him; he's the common man — he's us," said Michael Fagan, a volunteer work from Keansburg who has donated innumerable hours to the project.

And despite a few days of recent wet weather, Homes For Our Troops workers say they're on schedule to finish all the last-minute jobs to have the house ready for the Minards to move in.

Minard, his wife, and daughters Kayla, 6, and Brooke, 21 months old, will turn the front door key in a formal ceremony slated for next Monday at 11 a.m.

After that, the Minards will be moved in and spend their first night under their new roof.

The estimated \$275,000 home project was spearheaded by Taunton, Mass.-based Homes For Our Troops, a not-for-profit organization that builds homes for disabled service members and veterans all over the country.

Much of the construction materials for Minard's house have been donated, Clancy said, mentioning Harvey Windows, which provided \$8,000 in windows.

As for volunteer labor, "You can't say enough," said Holly Heath Gallagher, a volunteer project coordinator for Homes For Our Troops. "People were just lending us whatever they had."

It seems that when asked, no one could say no.

"Wherever I walked into, somebody wanted to help," Clancy said.

"I walked into Burger King and they give me 40 hamburgers, or I walk into McDonald's and they give me 40 Big Macs" Clancy said.

## A degree, a job search

Minard and his family have been living with his in-laws, John and Denise Maddock, in Keyport.

"For me, I can't wait to have a bed," Minard added. "For the last year, I've been sleeping on a couch with an inflatable air mattress."

What could be his final surgery is tentatively scheduled for early February.

Right now Minard is working on earning his associate degree online through a scholarship program he started while at Walter Reed.

Minard is also interviewing for an Army job to work at Fort Monmouth that could start in early 2010.

"I couldn't have it any other way," Minard said. "I'm 28 years old; I've got to do something."

## Additional Facts

### HOW TO HELP

Those interested in helping Staff Sgt. Michael Minard and his family can donate money to Homes For Our Troops by mail, telephone or online.

MAIL: Homes For Our Troops

6 Main St., Taunton, MA 02780

PHONE: Toll-free at 866-7-TROOPS (866-787-6677)

ONLINE: [www.homesforourtroops.org/donate](http://www.homesforourtroops.org/donate)

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