



# Housing Help For Returning Veterans

A group of Long Island builders broke ground Monday on what it hopes will be the first of many low-cost homes for returning vets

By Greg Cergol

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Omar Domenech, a former U.S. Army staff sergeant, was wounded in Iraq and awarded the Purple Heart.

A group of Long Island builders broke ground Monday on what they hope will be the first of many low-cost homes constructed for returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans.

"It's almost like hitting the lottery, an experience like this -- is this for real?" asked Omar Domenech, the buyer of the first home to be built on a small plot of vacant land in Sound Beach.

Domenech, a former U.S. Army staff sergeant, served two tours of duty in Iraq and one in Kuwait between 2004 and 2008. He was wounded in Iraq and was awarded the Purple Heart.

Like many returning vets, the father of two from Bay Ridge learned that finding an affordable home for his family wasn't easy.

"It was going to take a long time," Domenech chuckled.

Last November, the charity announced plans to build homes for Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans on vacant land donated by individuals or municipalities.

Developer Mark Baisch provided the first piece of land -- a tiny 80-foot by 60-foot plot in Sound Beach. Other builders will now follow his lead to cover the rest of the construction costs.

"People have stepped up to the plate and are giving one hundred percent of the material and labor to build this house," said Baisch.

Omar Domenech and his family were selected in May as the recipients of that first home.

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Forecast

It won't be free. The Domenech family will pay a \$100,000 for a home valued at about four times that amount. The money they pay, charity officials said, will be used to finance other homes for veterans.

"We want to give back, kind of pay it forward and say look what they did for us," said Angela Domenech.

Right now, the charity plans to construct at least 10 more homes, according to Baisch.

Interested vets can contact LI HBC at 631-232-2345 for information on how to apply for the homes yet to be built.

As for Omar Domenech, he is scheduled to leave his apartment in Bay Ridge for that new, 1,000 square-foot home in Sound Beach this November.

Builders hope he'll be the first in a long line of vets marching to a better life.

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