



Mike Dorman (this page, and opposite, center) began Military Missions in Action shortly after the passing of his grandfather, William Edwin Andrews. Andrews served in the Army Air Corps in World War II. His plane was shot down, and he was a POW for 17 months. Andrews received a Purple Heart (opposite, left) for his service.

Dorman and other volunteers, like Bob Jungleux and Jerry DeRoache (opposite, right), help build, adjust, and fix homes for injured veterans, continuing a legacy of service.



Home Fixed Home

Returning war veterans often can't live in their homes the way they used to. A North Carolina contractor is helping to fix that.

By Christa Gala

In the fall of 2007, Mike Dorman, a retired United States Coast Guardsman and contractor living in Fuquay-Varina, began noticing the media reports of seriously injured Iraq war veterans. Many had a hard time living in their homes, struggling with obstacles such as stairs or showers. That bothered Dorman.

For a few months, Dorman, 48, couldn't shake the feeling that he should be doing something to help. He met with Tim Virgilio, a licensed social worker, who at the time was working with war veterans at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Fayetteville, to gauge whether the need was really that great.

Virgilio told him that if he worked on 100 houses a month for 12 months, he still wouldn't have alleviated the problem. "Mike seemed to be very surprised by that statement," Virgilio says. "But it also seemed to energize him even more to move forward with establishing Military Missions in Action (MMIA)."

Dorman founded his nonprofit organization,

MMIA, in January 2008. "Our number-one focus for the returning disabled is to make their homes so they can live independently at no cost to them," Dorman says. "Our second, for any veteran who is disabled and cannot physically or financially take care of a safety hazard in their home, we'll go in and take care of that at no charge."

Virgilio and his colleagues have made at least 15 referrals to Dorman, varying from simple, one-day projects to complex home additions. "I have yet to see Mike turn down a request for help despite how big or how small it may be," says Virgilio.

Small steps

Kristin Poe, a Lillington resident and ninth-grade counselor at Harnett Central High School, heard about MMIA on the local news one night. She wrote a letter to Dorman about her husband, Mason, 28, a medically retired Marine Corps Staff Sergeant wounded in an explosion in Iraq in 2004. "He has had



Kristin Poe and her husband, retired Marine Corps Staff Sergeant Mason Poe, salute the flag at a Military Missions in Action groundbreaking ceremony for the addition to their home in Lillington.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIM LAMBERT

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32 surgeries and is very fortunate to be alive,” Kristin wrote. “Our home has very steep stairs leading to all of the bedrooms in the house. Mason has tremendous difficulty getting up and down the stairs.”

Kristin’s letter had good news, too. Mason had come a long way. After spending a month in a coma, doctors first predicted he’d be paralyzed, but he is walking. And the Poes were expecting their first baby. A master

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bedroom on the first floor would enable Mason to actively help with his new daughter. Dorman agreed that a new addition to the Poes' home was the answer.

The 24-by-26-foot addition will include a master bedroom and bath with space that can be used as a nursery. Dorman estimates the project will cost

between \$45,000 and \$50,000. He's raised roughly half of that amount. "If I had to wait until I had all my money to start a project, I would never start," he says.

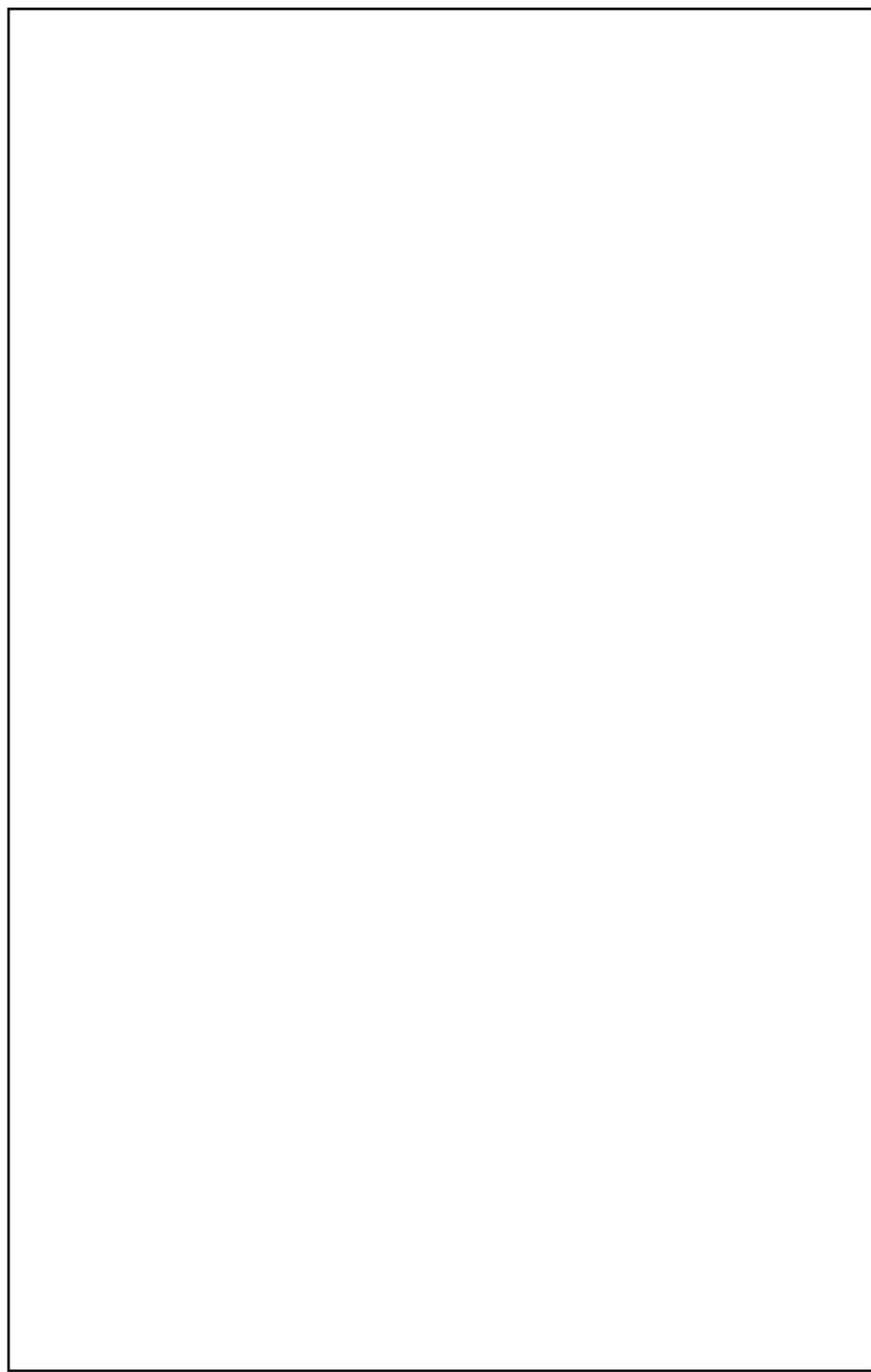
Groundbreaking work

For major projects, Dorman holds a groundbreaking ceremony. U.S. Representative Bob Etheridge attended Mason's groundbreaking, where Marines, clad in dress blues, raised the United States and Marine Corps flags on a freshly installed flagpole.

A local church has started deconstruction work while Dorman waits for the necessary permits. Three churches are standing by to help, and one has offered to pay for roofing materials and labor. Harnett County has agreed to have an inspector on-site to speed things up. Recently, Dorman received an \$8,000 materials donation from a company in West Virginia. He drove 520 miles round-trip to bring back windows, doors, interior trim, and flooring joists.

Dorman is also anticipating the "what if" scenarios of Mason's future. The addition will be wheelchair accessible and the master closet elevator-ready. The Poes are excited. "I want to be a good dad and a good husband," Mason says. "I think it's great there's an organization like this; we need more."

Mason made a strong impression on Dorman.



“I was getting ready to leave, and Mason said, ‘Mike, I got a question for you.’ He said, ‘What gives me the right to ask your organization to come in and do this for me when there are so many more out there that need it worse than I do?’ I picked up his Purple Heart certificate and said, ‘Mason, this gives you the right.’”

In the name of sacrifice

Military Missions in Action needs three things: money, materials, and volunteers. The organization receives no government funding. Many veterans, including Mason, often are reluctant to talk about their needs. But by sharing his story, Mason hopes he can shed some light on MMIA.

“As a veteran, you want to take care of your own; it doesn’t really matter what branch,” he says. “To have Mike Dorman sacrifice his [compensation] to assist other veterans and veterans who have been injured in combat, it’s absolutely wonderful.”

Dorman has learned a lot about the logistics of running a nonprofit. He takes every opportunity to raise awareness about the organization, speaking at meetings and special events.

There are surprises, too, some better than others. “I never realized how much my life was going to change when I had the calling to do this,” he says. “It’s very rewarding to me as an individual; it’s also a struggle. I went from being a contractor to being a volunteer, and with that comes a huge pay cut.”

But Dorman does not struggle alone. Last fall, he finished a project in Whiteville for a 24-year-old soldier who suffered a traumatic brain injury in Iraq and returned home to his wife and two young children.

“When the VA called and told me about it, I did the site visit,”

Dorman says.

“The ceiling in the master bedroom was black and green from mold and mildew growing on it and the water seepage coming in.” Western Cedar Supply in Garner donated 45 squares of shingles, which Tilley Brothers Body Shop in Fuquay-Varina transported from Garner to Whiteville. Dorman then gathered

a group of volunteer roofers and spent two days re-roofing the soldier's house.

Getting it right

These days, it's dawning on Dorman that Virgilio was right. No matter how hard or fast he works, there's never a shortage of projects. But there's always a shortage of money.

"I tell people all the time that sometimes I understand how the disciples felt when they were standing at the hill looking at 5,000 people to feed with five loaves and two fish," Dorman says. But things always work out. "I showed up in Pinehurst for one project; we had \$2,000 in the bank, and we were able to do \$14,000 worth of work," he says.

MMIA is a double-edged sword for Dorman. It both soothes his soul and breaks his heart. The latter sets his resolve.

"It doesn't matter if you're young or old, Democrat or Republican, rich or poor, we all have a duty to help take care of these veterans who have given so much for our freedom," Dorman says. "We failed the soldiers returning from Vietnam, and this time we have the opportunity to get it right." 

Christa Gala lives in Apex.



to learn more

To make a donation to Military Missions in Action call Mike Dorman at (919) 868-0054, or for a link to the Military Missions in Action website, go to www.ourstate.com, and click on "This Month's Issue."

