

## Organization Donates Pasadena House to Injured Iraqi War Veteran

By Hayley Gable for The Pasadena Voice  
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April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008 marked the date that forever drastically changed the life of Sgt. Luis Rosa-Valentin and his family. Just two days before his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, while leading a patrol outside of Baghdad, a roadside bomb explosion caused him to lose both legs, his left arm and hearing in both ears.

Since returning over a year ago from his nearly fatal tour in Iraq, Rosa-Valentin has resided

with his wife, America and two young daughters in cramped living space at Fort Meade. Although the family has faced many difficulties while learning to cope with Luis's injuries over the past year, their sacrifice and dedication has certainly not gone unnoticed.

Around two months ago, Massachusetts-based organization Homes for Our Troops, whose mission is to build specially adapted homes for severely injured veterans around the country who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, selected Sgt. Rosa-Valentin as the recipient of a newly-built home on 1.5 acres in Pasadena. The house, which features several specially-built amenities such as a wheelchair-accessible shower and a motorized ceiling track lift-care system, was originally constructed for another triple-amputee Iraqi war veteran. However, shortly before presenting the house keys this past June in an elaborate and celebratory ceremony, it was discovered that the veteran for whom the house was originally meant for had already owned many properties.

With the newly-constructed 2,400 square-foot Pasadena home sitting uninhabited, Homes for Our Troops searched the Maryland area for other disabled Iraqi War veterans who were in need of better housing. After reviewing a list of injured soldiers in their database, it quickly became clear that Sgt. Rosa-Valentin was the perfect candidate. John Gonsalves, who founded Homes for Our Troops in 2004, was excited about their



selection. "Sgt. Rosa-Valentin has dedicated his life to this country and has such an incredible story, the very least we can do is give back in some way," he said.

Luis Rosa Valentin's story began on September 11, 2001. While the rest of the country watched the horrific events of that day in disbelief, Luis left his home in Fort Meade for his first day of basic training. Having been raised in a military family, Rosa-Valentin aspired to be a soldier in the Army just like his father and grandfather had been. As a student at Fort Meade High School, he joined ROTC and made plans to enlist after graduation. The decision, he said, "felt natural".

Upon his completion of basic training, Rosa-Valentin was deployed to Iraq for a 15-month tour that began in 2003. After returning home and being assigned a recruiting position in Florida, he went against the wishes and pleas of his family by voluntarily enlisting for a second deployment to Iraq. It was during this tour that Sgt. Rosa-Valentin almost lost his life while leading his patrol through a horrific ambush.

"I spent two weeks in a coma, and when I woke up it was a completely different world," Luis explained. "When something like this happens, there is absolutely nothing that can prepare you for it."

Homes For our Troops, a nationwide organization which has orchestrated the construction of more houses in this past year than they have since their establishment, recognized and celebrated the efforts of Rosa-Valentin by presenting him with the keys to the fully-furnished, barrier-free Pasadena home in a ceremony held on September 11 – all at no cost.

"It is fitting that we honor Sgt. Rosa-Valentin's service and sacrifice on this date," said Homes for Our Troops Founder John Gonsalves before presenting Rosa-Valentin with the house key. "It's sort of a dual purpose anniversary where we're able to reflect on the tragic events... but we can also reflect on the beginning of his military career, and now his new life in this home."

Also in attendance at the presentation to show their appreciation was Edward Chow, state secretary of foreign affairs, Heather Campbella, who was representing U.S. Senator Ben Cardin, and Delegate Nic Kipke, who presented the Rosa-Valentin family with a gift bag filled with several various local Pasadena business gift certificates and coupons.

Additionally, many of the hard-working volunteers were present, including the Ellicott City-based construction company Arrisbrook Builders, which is owned and operated by former Marines Spencer Padgett and Aaron Drummond. Both Padgett and Drummond had heard of Homes for Our Troops before and volunteered without hesitation to build the house this past year.

Despite the fact that Sgt. Rosa-Valentin is now a triple amputee, he feels no regret towards his nearly-fatal decision to voluntarily deploy to Iraq. "I was born a fighter and a warrior, and here I am – still a fighter, still a warrior."

Sitting outside the new home aside wife America, 5 year-old daughter Milinda and 3 month-old daughter Bella, Luis Rosa-Valentin beamed with happiness at the house before him. "This isn't just a house, this is a gift of life," he concluded.