



New development opens for injured vets at Homewood's Lakeshore Foundation (with slideshow and video)

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Jeff Hansen -- The Birmingham News



Enlarge

Joe Songer -- The Birmingham News

Wounded veteran Paul Thurman and his family were the first to move into the new cabins at Lakeshore Foundation in Homewood. Four injured veterans and their family members will be here participating in the grand opening of the Cottages on 11/11 as well as Operation Refocus activities which include fitness and recreation at Lakeshore Foundation on Wednesday. Carolyn Thurman, 2, enjoys the new slide at the childrens playground at the Lakeshore Cottages. (Joe Songer-The Birmingham News)

Four injured veterans and their families flew in from Texas, California and Washington state Tuesday to be the first guests of a new hilltop community on the Lakeshore Foundation campus in Homewood.

Paul R. Thurman, 27, of Saginaw, Texas -- along with his wife, Tanya, children Kayla, Megan, William, Tyler and Carolyn, and yellow Labrador service dog, Sgt. Lucky -- were the first to arrive. They are staying in a brand-new three-bedroom cottage built as part of Operation Lakeshore.

"This place is wow!" Thurman said of the cottage. "It exceeds my wildest expectations. If I was in my wheelchair still, I could have gotten around just fine."

Thurman has traumatic brain injuries from an IED explosion in Iraq, where he served in the U.S. Army, and from two other accidents. He also has post-traumatic stress disorder.

Last year, Thurman said, a Lakeshore program for injured veterans changed his life.

"It got me out of that funk of distress," he said. "Out of sadness and not caring for myself."

Cottages of Lakeshore opens gallery (10 photos)

Lakeshore has run a variety of camps and programs for injured veterans, but the housing was dormitory style. Two new cottages and four

duplexes built by Operation Lakeshore, a \$2.3 million philanthropic effort, will provide a free place for the entire family to stay temporarily -- including Sgt. Lucky. The residences include kitchens and an outdoor playground for the children.

Operation Lakeshore was led by businessman Michael Mouron, president of Capstone Companies, and many companies and groups have supplied material, time and money to build the residences.

Injured veterans and their families will use the residences during short visits to Lakeshore for camps and programs.

A grand opening ceremony will be held Thursday morning, Veterans Day.

Lakeshore's programs help injured vets learn to be active and independent through sport or recreation -- even if the veteran has been blinded or paralyzed, lost a limb or had other serious injury. Thurman and the three other veterans have all been in a previous Lakeshore program. Today, they will take part in an Operation Refocus program, to help Lakeshore review its programs and see how they can be improved, said Damian Veazey, Lakeshore's director of communication.

Thurman said Sgt. Lucky is a medical alertness dog. The Labrador can warn when Thurman is about to have a seizure, and Sgt. Lucky also wakes him from night terrors and keeps him from having panic attacks.

"He's a big blessing for my wife," Thurman said.

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