

## Purple Heart Home Project

*By Patrick Eakes, DGE, District 7690*

About a year ago, then President-Elect Brian Sowers led Crescent Rotary Club on a search for a special service project to mark its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. “We wanted to do something extraordinary - a signature project of sorts - that would be impactful, maybe build new corporate relationships and also hopefully create more community awareness of Rotary, and specifically Crescent Rotary.”

Soon thereafter, Sowers was introduced to Purple Heart Homes. The Statesville, NC not-for-profit group, founded by two disabled Iraq War veterans, helps disabled veterans become homeowners and assists aging disabled vets remain in their homes. That’s when Sowers, a former Marine himself, was introduced to Marine Sgt. Nathan Harris. Harris, whose story is captured in an award-winning documentary film titled Hell and Back Again, is a disabled veteran of the Afghanistan war from Yadkinville, NC. A machine gun shattered his hip and leg, severing his femoral artery. Due to that injury, he now uses a walker or cane, and he also suffers from traumatic brain injury from the blood loss.

What transpired over the next ten months or so can best be described as a powerfully contagious mission. “We were determined that we were going to find a suitable home for Nathan. The effort just began taking on a life of its own,” said Sowers, now President of Crescent Rotary Club. An unnamed bank sold a house in Greensboro at a deep discount. The Home Depot, whose foundation is dedicated to building homes for vets, became a major sponsor. TIMCO Aviation Services, where more than half the workforce is made up of veterans, raised almost \$38,000. Other major contributors of funding, resources and labor included not only Crescent Rotary members, but also many other companies and organizations - Disaster One, Wet ‘n Wild Emerald Pointe, Fairway Outdoor Advertising, C.P. Eakes Company, Forbis & Dick, WFMY News2, Awards of Excellence and the list goes on to also include Triad Flight of Honor.

On November 11, 2013, Crescent Rotary and its partners celebrated Veterans Day by dedicating a restored home, modified to accommodate his needs, to Sgt. Nathan Harris. “I guess I probably owe a few thank-you’s,” Harris said with a grin. “But there’s no way to figure out how to be thankful enough.”

The dedication and Harris’ story was featured on the front page of Greensboro’s News & Record and was covered by each of the Triad’s local television networks. CNN also filmed work on the home earlier in November to be used in an upcoming story.

But Crescent Rotary and Sowers know their work isn’t finished. “He still needs our help, and we want to become his extended family. We want this to be the start of a new life for him.” The Club has already started work on duplicating what it achieved in 2013, for another war veteran in 2014.

Something extraordinary, indeed.

