

Home Memorial

DAV and the Home Depot Foundation help a family honor a wife, mother, Army veteran.

By Charity A. Edgar

Erasmo and Maria Flores learned in the Army to never give up, and both took that tenet to heart when they fought the battle of their lives.

Erasmo, who joined the Army as a combat engineer on his 19th birthday, served in Iraq twice. On his second deployment, he met Maria, a chemical specialist, whom he would later marry. “The universe was telling me I wanted to be around her and make her happy,” said Erasmo.

Maria was honorably discharged from the Army in 2010 to focus on their children. She also began pursuing a degree in nursing. Erasmo was medically discharged a year later, derailing plans for a lifetime military career. He then worked as a personal trainer while pursuing a degree in architecture.

“We were on our way as civilians,” said Erasmo. “We were enjoying life, reaching for our goals.”

That all changed with Maria’s diagnosis of cervical cancer in 2012.

When Maria began chemotherapy, medical bills began to mount, so the Flores family moved to a more affordable area. When Lisa Roybal, the manager of the Women Veterans Clinic, delivered some items to the new home, she saw it did not have a dryer. She also noticed a lack of landscaping and thought that colorful plants around the house might aid Maria’s healing. Roybal wasted no time contacting the Home Depot in Victorville, Calif.

The Home Depot Foundation provides home-improvement grants so that the volunteers of registered



nonprofit organizations can improve the physical health of their communities. Because of their past successes coordinating home-improvement projects, DAV San Bernardino Chapter 12 was approached to help.

“Our Chapter has been able to identify ill and injured veteran homeowners in need of assistance to improve their quality of life,” said Richard Valdez, Commander of the Department of California and Chapter 12 member. “We had just turned in two applications, so after hearing Maria and Erasmo’s story, I turned their application in the very next day, and it was approved later that week.”

“Our volunteer efforts are successful because of the creative initiatives of our Departments and Chapters,” said National Director of Voluntary Services Ron Minter. “San Bernardino Chapter 12’s partnership with the Home Depot Foundation underscores how out-of-the-box thinking can result in local programs that make a big difference for our nation’s veterans.”

Maria was in remission during the project and was slated to start a new job when severe pain rerouted her to the emergency room instead.

On Oct. 2, 2013, after a year-long battle with cancer, Maria passed away at age 28.

The home now serves as a memorial to Maria that her family will enjoy for years to come.

San Bernardino Chapter 12 transformed the landscaping plans into a memorial garden and made a play area with a swing set for the Flores children.

Volunteers from DAV and Home Depot erected a flag pole with an inscribed memorial granite stone donated by one of the store’s vendors.



Volunteers from San Bernardino Chapter 12 and the Victorville Home Depot stand with Erasmo Flores III and his son Erasmo Flores IV in their freshly landscaped yard. San Bernardino Chapter 12 partners with the Home Depot Foundation to improve the quality of life for disabled veterans by beautifying and enhancing their homes.

Get Involved

The Home Depot Foundation is on a mission to ensure every veteran has a safe place to call home, and your Chapter can help.

- STEP 1** **Identify** a disabled veteran whose home needs sprucing up. Prepare a description of the scope of the project.
- STEP 2** **Contact** your local Home Depot. Arrange to meet with the Team Depot captain or a store manager. Home Depot will contact the veteran, perform a site survey and provide the Chapter with a price quote.
- STEP 3** **Complete** the “Partner Request” and “Grant Request” forms provided by Home Depot. The grant request can be completed online at www.homedepotfoundation.org/page/teamdepotapplication. You will need to attach the following documents:
- Proof of your Chapter’s nonprofit status
 - Certificate of liability insurance
 - Partner Request Form
 - Home Depot’s price quote
- STEP 4** **Sign and return** the grant agreement after the application is approved.
- STEP 5** **Finalize** the work schedule and contact the Team Depot captain to purchase the materials using the gift cards provided by Home Depot.

NOTE

- Your Chapter’s contact person must have signature authority to commit the Chapter, as these are legal documents.
- The application and all correspondence is done online and by email.
- Limit the scope of work to tasks that won’t require permits or specialized workers.

MORE

For more information, contact National Director of Voluntary Services Ron Minter at 859-442-2347 or rminter@dav.org. You can also visit www.homedepotfoundation.org.

“The impressive contributions that Chapter 12 gave the Flores family—and other veterans in need—highlight DAV’s focus on veterans helping veterans,” said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “We are committed to the service of those who sacrificed in our defense.”

“We have the same goal—doing our part in taking care of vets,” said Team Depot Captain Jennifer Lamb. “Home Depot has a foundation that wants to give back to the community, and this is our way of thanking veterans for their sacrifice.”

Countless hours of work by volunteers have given Maria’s husband and children Mary, 15; Marisela, 13; Sergio, 12; Marisa, 10 and Erasmo IV, 4, a tribute visible to the entire community.

“The house now serves as an inspiration and gives our family hope. The children all stressed the importance of being successful and making Maria proud,” said Erasmo. “They know that she was there for them, and it reminds them that she continues to be.” ■

Left: Erasmo and Maria Flores smile with their children Mary, Marisela, Sergio, Marisa and Erasmo IV. Below: The flag pole and granite stone memorial honoring Army Veteran Maria Flores serve as a visible tribute to her husband and children.

