

Don and Mae Marshall had rented a space in an RV park for 14 years before qualifying for this 1,100-sf, energy-efficient home in Veterans Village.

Welcome Home

By Danielle Stroud

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Habitat for Humanity builds an affordable Veterans Village in central Florida

Drawing Board

In the heart of Florida, in the small town of Umatilla, sits the newly built Veterans Village, a quality, affordable community built with a purpose by Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter, Florida. With more than 50,000 veterans in the region, Habitat of Lake-Sumter created a housing initiative in 2012, emphasizing the importance of creating repair and homeownership opportunities for the veteran population.

Veterans Village consists of 13 homes for low- to moderate-income veterans, military members, and spouses of those who

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Pitched metal roofs, typical of Florida Cracker style architecture, help reflect heat in the state's subtropical climate. Spray foam insulation under the decking and extra-thick walls help reduce energy costs.



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(Above) Narrow lots and front porches, a key elements of the Veterans Village neighborhood design, make it easier for residents to get to know each other.

(Left) To help promote a sense of community, Habitat chose to leave the waterfront lots open as a gathering spot; typically, those lots would be sold at a premium. Mailboxes at a centrally located gazebo are another way to bring residents together.

have served. The project is not simply a neighborhood, but a collaboration. Through the network of partners that Habitat of Lake-Sumter established, Veterans Village families have access to holistic, wraparound services, including



Reed and Michele Vonhold had lived in a one-room apartment for more than a decade before moving into their home at Veterans Village. Like all Habitat home owners, they were required to invest 200 hours of “sweat equity” into the construction of their house or other Habitat homes.

assistance with their careers, mental and physical health, transportation, finances, education, legal issues, and navigating the Department of Veterans Affairs.

A HIGHLY SKILLED DESIGN TEAM

Habitat of Lake-Sumter CEO Kent Adcock wanted a design team that would create a unique, high-quality neighborhood within the envelope of affordability.

Adcock envisioned a coastal Florida Cracker architecture, with pastel color palettes and metal roofs.

“I wanted this community to include some of the best homes we’ve designed,” Adcock said. “Our veterans deserve it, and just because something is affordable doesn’t mean it has to be inferior.”

The designers of The Villages, an internationally known active adult community in Central Florida, were invited to join the team. Michael Pape and Associates started the project by creating the master plan,

The Villages design architect Bill Jones crafted the architectural design and color palettes, and AgeWave Solutions executed the construction drawings and home specifications.

“I was excited when Kent asked me to join the team,” Michael Pape said. “It was a unique idea, and I was happy to bring life to the vision they had been planning for so long.”

As the team designed the community, the goal was to offer an old-time neighborhood feeling, encouraging the



Deep porches, designed to provide ample shade from the blistering Florida sun, are perhaps the defining element of the Cracker style.

residents to connect through their military experiences. The homes feature front-porch living, with rear-loading driveways and staggered front-yard setbacks to allow every resident an unobstructed view of Lake Enola. Instead of building homes on the two lake-front lots, the design team chose to incorporate shared spaces, once again encouraging the residents to interact. The plan for the common areas featured a circular memorial garden and flagpole, as well as a community gazebo.

AFFORDABLE ENERGY

In addition to Habitat of Lake-Sumter’s emphasis on aesthetics, they also wanted to ensure the homes were built with integrity and sustainability. Each home is roughly 1,200 – 1,300 sf and features energy-efficient appliances, windows, and doors. The homes also include a higher level of insulation than Habitat’s other models, with increased wall thickness and spray foam under the decking of the metal roofs.

The layouts of the homes also incorporated universal design features, including flush thresholds, wider doorways and turnarounds, and a roll-in shower in one of the bathrooms.

“We wanted to ensure that we could accommodate any veteran, no matter their age or physical limitations,” Adcock said.

PHOTOS BY FUREY



Energy-efficient windows, appliances, and lighting increase the affordability of the homes.

PROUD HOME OWNERS

All 13 homes in Veterans Village have been completed, with the common areas slated to be finished by this fall. The total project cost was \$2.5 million, funded through not only philanthropic channels, but also creative lending opportunities and the zero-equivalent mortgages that each home owner received.

The Vonholds were the first family to move into the community. Reed Vonhold served in the United States Coast Guard and moved his family to Florida after finishing his service. As first-time home buyers, Reed and Michele Vonhold were excited to be part of a community of

fellow veterans with such an emphasis on relationships.

“It’s a dream come true,” Michele Vonhold said. “We got to work side by side with the volunteers who helped build our house. Their generosity amazes me; we couldn’t be more appreciative.”

As Habitat of Lake-Sumter looks to the future, they continue to create innovative, affordable housing solutions. With the Veterans Village coming to an end, the Habitat affiliate has begun work on a new development for 600-sf, cottage-sized homes. 🏠

Danielle Stroud is the director of development for Habitat for Humanity Lake-Sumter, Florida.



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