



Meg Nordale of GHEMM, Sgt. Senecal, his 5-year-old daughter Kiley, and AGC of Alaska Executive Director John MacKimon cut the ceremonial ribbon during the Oct. 7, 2010 open house.

CONTRACTORS, COMMUNITY HELP WOUNDED WARRIOR

Operation Opening Doors completes 1st Fairbanks project

BY RACHAEL KVAPIL

Tucked away in a remote North Pole neighborhood, surrounded by earth-tone homes that blend with the trees, Army Sgt. Anthony Senecal and his wife Brenda have established a beacon of hope after a tragic incident changed their lives. At first it appears to be just another house, but its bold, hot-green paint and complementary emerald green trim are symbolic of the early stages of Sgt. Senecal's recovery from a helicopter crash in Iraq more than a year ago.

"The greens are the colors of the wheelchair the hospital had custom ordered for him," said Mrs. Senecal as she stood in the kitchen with Sgt. Senecal during the open house to celebrate renovations made through Operation Opening Doors (OOD), a program sponsored by The Associated General Contractors of Alaska (AGC) and its members.

The Senecal home is the first in Fairbanks to receive an OOD makeover. Jim Walter of GHEMM Company Inc. took on the task of identifying the necessary renovations,



PHOTOS: RACHAEL KVAPIL

Textured carpet in the home that created mobility issues for Sgt. Senecal was replaced with vinyl flooring or loop-pile carpet.

soliciting volunteer manpower and material donations, and coordinating efforts during a two-month period. Walter met with AGC, the Senecals and Sgt. Senecal's physical therapist to brainstorm ways to improve mobility and usability in and around the home.

In addition to a traumatic brain injury that has made speech difficult, the accident left a bone growth in Sgt. Senecal's hip that creates problems with flexibility and pain. This makes everyday activities like scooting chairs around and walking difficult, so Operation Opening Doors focused on mobility improvements that will help to alleviate such problems.

Brice Inc., Exclusive Paving and Great Northwest Inc. supplied site work and materials to regrade and resurface the driveway and backyard.

Materials for a new back deck, railings for the front and basement stairs and window casing trim were donated by Spenard Builders Supply. Sherwin Williams contributed paint supplies with labor provided by Bush Painting Inc. and Dynamic Painting Inc.

The home's renovation includes new carpet and vinyl flooring by Florcraft Inc. Aurora Construction Supply Inc. provided grab bars for the bathrooms and Denali Mechanical Inc. supplied and installed ADA raised height toilets.

A metal handrail at the garage stair was supplied by Griffard Steel and

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Bathrooms in the Senecal home were retrofitted with grab bars and ADA raised height toilets

SimplexGrinnell donated smoke alarms. GHEMM employees also finished installing a previously purchased exterior door.

The renovations took place in two stages. Work on the home's exterior started in August before the temperatures dropped, and then moved indoors in late September. Paul Edstrom, GHEMM's superintendent, credits Walter for making sure everything ran smoothly.

"This is something really important that we do for our community," Edstrom said while working on the rear deck in September. "Jim has put in a lot of time and effort to make sure everything gets done."

Walter said he is impressed by how willing people were to assist with the Senecal's renovations.

"People in Fairbanks really stepped up to the plate," he said.

The project's completion was celebrated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on the front porch of the Senecal home. AGC of Alaska Executive Director John MacKinnon, cut the ribbon, donated by Santina's Flowers, alongside Sgt. Senecal, his 5-year-old daughter Kiley, and Meg Nordale of GHEMM.

Afterward volunteers toured the home to see the completed improvements. In the coming months Sgt. Senecal will transition to civilian life and begin working on a business venture the family purchased last summer.

"This has helped so much with the recovery and the transition," said Mrs. Senecal, "not just for Tony, but for me as well. It's made getting used to the changes that much easier." 📖

Rachael Kvapil is a writer and photographer who lives in Fairbanks, Alaska.



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