

Column: Veterans build a home for veterans

By

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**JIM
SMITH**
A Vet's View

By Jim Smith

United Way of Long Island and United Veterans Beacon House officials were beaming on Nov. 13 at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for an energy efficient home at 40 Depot Road in Huntington Station.

The home for five veterans with special needs was built by veterans from United Way's five-year-old VetsBuild program. About half of the program's 150 graduates have been Beacon House clients; the Bay Shore nonprofit runs 40 homeless

shelters for veterans and others.

The ribbon-cutting was preceded by a graduation ceremony at the Huntington Opportunity Resource Center for nine of the latest VetsBuild graduates.

All are Beacon House clients. Beacon House president Frank Amalfitano handed out the diplomas. The event was covered by Ch. 2, Ch. 11 and Ch. 12.

"This is the iPhone of homes, the highest-technology home you can build," said Rick Wertheim, United Way's senior vice president of housing and green initiatives. "It has advanced energy savings [via a solar heating system], so there will be water savings. There are controlled air changes. When it senses something wrong, it ventilates itself. It's durable and healthy...The magic of this is that there is a severe need for this kind of housing."

The house is the third energy efficient home in Beacon House's inventory but the first built by veterans for veterans.

VetsBuild workers were aided in the work by architect Jean-Pierre Lardoux of Fusion Architecture LLC of Plainview; Kevin J. Creamer, president of Sunshine Plus Solar in West Babylon; Carl Krause of Northeast Gas Specialists, a Bethpage training company; and Tim Warnecke of Marplat Co., a Westbury plumbing, heating and ventilation firm.

For information on VetsBuild, call 631-940-3722 or email rwertheim@unitedwayli.org.

A total of 40 VetsBuild graduates worked on the project. Wertheim praised the veterans as being "process and mission-oriented."

He said VetsBuild endeavors to place graduates in jobs after they complete the six-week course given in a Deer Park warehouse that contains an entire house. "They are very much positioned to get a great job," Wertheim. "This [diploma] will very much help them find work. We need a work force to support this innovation."

Graduate Jerome Robinson said, "This is an extremely proud moment for me. We are looking

forward to moving forward and finding a new and exciting career. I learned so much. This course is truly teaching the future of construction and I'm looking forward to being a part of it."

Another graduate, Jaime Galante, said his long-term goal is to run his own construction business. The other graduates were John Denton, Philip Gervasio, Robert Kennedy, Roger Miller, Oswaldo Perez, Kirk Philips and Rick Barnes.

Lardoux said of the five-bedroom, two-story, blue-sided home with a porch, "We made it look very traditional so it would blend in with the neighborhood, but inside it is very sophisticated." The house has a Bosch high-efficiency boiler. The heating system generates enough electricity to offset the cost of operating the house. The house has wood flooring, non-toxic paint and low energy lighting that senses occupancy. Beacon House is providing a house manager and a case manager.

Amalfitano, Beacon House president since 1999, said, "It makes me feel great. This is really heartwarming because I'm a Vietnam vet and there was nothing like this when I came home." He said Beacon House employees do outreach to homeless veterans, the intakes on them and the referrals to VetsBuild, and then monitor their progress. He added, "We provide the tools for them move on with their lives."