

Taking the Wounded Warrior recovery process a step further

By Sara Goodeyon, Tulsa District Public Affairs

Once a service member is wounded, in battle or the line of duty, they are taken to a military hospital to recover. Those hospitals are built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as part of its military construction program. Now, in the USACE Southwestern Division, there are plans for that recovery process to evolve from the hospital to a special cottage at a Corps lake to allow invisible wounds to heal.

It's the Honor Cottage at Cross-Timbers on Skiatook Lake, Okla. It is made possible by a partnership between the Tulsa District USACE, the Skiatook Economic Development Authority, Cross-Timbers Marina owner, Ron Howell, and the Folds of Honor Foundation. Ground breaking for the cottage was Nov. 28 with plans for the cottage to welcome the first guests by Memorial Day 2013.

"We know our role with our military construction responsibilities; we are building numerous hospitals and other medical facilities. We are honored and privileged to be able to construct world class health care facilities, to allow the medical professionals to treat our wounded, ill, and injured," said Col. R.J. Muraski, USACE Southwestern Division deputy commander, during remarks at the ground breaking. "The unique thing about this cottage program dedicated to the wounded warrior is that now we're

able to help after the physical injuries have healed. Now there are some invisible wounds that need healing, and the outdoors is a great therapeutic place for that. We're grateful to be a part of that."

The 1,100 square foot Honor Cottage will be situated on a secluded hillside overlooking Skiatook Lake and is located

funds from the Folds of Honor Foundation, an organization that provides spouses and children of the wounded and fallen educational scholarships. The Oklahoma-based organization was founded by now retired Oklahoma Air National Guard pilot Maj. Dan Rooney.

"What a natural and positive evolution for the recipients of the Folds of Honor to have a place to come for that healing," said Rooney.

Retired Army Major Ed Pulido, senior vice president of Folds of Honor, said the cottage will be a message to the families that their country loves them and supports them and welcomes them home.

"At the end of the day, when you're recovering from a traumatic brain injury or post traumatic stress, this is a great place for recovery," said Pulido, who lost part of his leg while serving in Iraq in 2004.

Col. Muraski praised the partnerships between the Corps, Howell, and the Folds of Honor, "We need to remember that once a conflict is over, sometimes the public forgets that we've got wounded warriors who still need our support," said Col. Muraski. "We want to stand not only behind them but beside them and support them as they transition and continue to get their lives back together. It's great to be a part of it. I think the division and district have great partnerships with them."



Folds of Honor Foundation founder Maj. Dan Rooney, CrossTimbers developer Ron Howell, Southwestern Division Deputy Commander Col. Richard Muraski, retired U.S. Army Maj. Ed Pulido (brown jacket), and retired U.S. Army Sgt. Ronny Sweger and his sons, Brett, Briggs, and Brooks Sweger break ground for the Honor Cottage at Skiatook Lake, Okla., Nov. 28. The Sweger children are recipients of Folds of Honor scholarships for their future education. (Photo by Tulsa District)

within the CrossTimbers development built by Howell's firm. It will be dedicated for the exclusive and cost free use of the veterans served by Folds of Honor. Guests will have the use of nearby trails and a wheelchair-accessible pontoon boat. Howell also promised to keep the adjacent property free of development to preserve the therapeutic privacy of the cottage.

The cottage is funded by a \$250,000 investment of donated