

HELPING AN AMERICAN HERO

Kickoff event held for Dobos family's new home

By LAKESHIA KNARR

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LOCK HAVEN — “Do what you can until you can’t,” Marine Lance Corporal Timothy Dobos said Saturday morning, as community members gathered around him, kicking off a big step in his life’s journey.

Dobos, 28, who served as an electronic warfare analyst, was deployed to Kuwait in 2009 and assisted in relief efforts after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig’s disease, in 2014. Since then, he’s experienced a deterioration of his physical abilities.

He, his wife Robyn, and their two sons, 3-year-old Grove and Ezekial, born about four weeks ago, have been living in an apartment that has been difficult for Dobos to navigate.

To assist him with his special needs is Homes For Our Troops, an organization committed to building homes across the country for severely injured veterans post 9/11. Over 2004 homes have been built since 2004 by HFOT, which relies on contributions from donors, supporters, and corporate partners for each veteran’s home.

The single-level home planned here will more easily accommodate Dobos’ power-operated wheelchair, and he will finally be able to access every room in his house, as more than 40 special adaptations are being planned. Some include front-loading washer and dryer, a roll-in shower, pull-down shelving and lowered counters in the kitchen, wider hallways, ramps, carpetless floors, and more.

Perhaps the best part, though, is that the specially adapted home being constructed in Bald Eagle Township will be mortgage free.

Saturday’s event, held at the Durrwachter Alumni Conference Center on the Lock Haven University campus, signified the kickoff for the build, and gave the community an opportunity to embrace the family.

It began with a small motorcade comprised of city and university police, the Lock Haven Fire Department, motorcyclists, and Dobos himself — as family, friends and community supporters stood outside Durrwachter waiving patriotic flags.

A video played inside before the program began, in which Dobos and Robyn were both seen talking about hopes for their new home.

“This house ... will allow me to do things for a longer period of time,” Dobos says.

As the program began, Mary Espinoza of HFOT welcomed guests and thanked Dobos for his service. “You are what makes this country great,” she said. The Pennsylvania Patriot

Guard Riders presented Dobos with a plaque, honoring his service as a “true patriot leader.”

Josh Grimes, pastor of Common Place Church and friend of the Dobos family, also spoke.

He said he met Dobos about four years ago when he first moved to town, and has helped him move twice since.

“This is the last time. This is it; stay there,” Grimes said jokingly.

“Tim is one of the most patient men I’ve ever met. His thoughtfulness is beyond that of the normal person. And he is just so kind,” the friend continued, outlining Dobos’ story with ALS. “It’s almost like it was a catalyst... It made him more generous, more patient, more kind.”

Grimes said, knowing the Doboses, the family is going to turn their new home “into a space where they can love other people.”

He told them he loved them. “Christ has forged you into beautiful souls and I’m proud to be your pastor.”

Another friend and close mentor, Dr. Anura Goonewardene, professor of physics at LHU, praised Dobos for his work ethic and ability to do the best he could, no matter what.

A father of a special needs child, he said it was heartbreaking to watch Dobos go through a sudden deterioration of health.

“He is a huge inspiration to all of us here at LHU,” Goonewardene said. “By his deeds, he is showing all of us... that giving up is the easy way out... I wish him all the best and will support him as best I can.”

Maria Valentin, aunt and caretaker of Roberto Reyes, another HFOT veteran honoree of Hawley, Pa., spoke of her experience, telling the crowd of roughly 50 that she didn’t believe a new home for her nephew was possible until he was moving in.

Roberto had previously been in a nursing home, but he wanted to go home.

“It was my last hope,” Valentin said of HFOT. When they called, “that’s when I truly started to believe again... There are people out there who can make a difference in people’s lives.”

She said the new home for Roberto, which he received keys to in January, is amazing.

“It has also given me the opportunity to see him get better,” she said. “Although he may not be who he was, he is much better. His spirit, his attitude ... he’s home.”

As Robyn took to the podium to tell the Doboses’ story, she held back her emotions.

“This is a very big and exciting event happening in our lives,” the mother of two said as she thanked family for unconditional love and support. “Lock Haven, I just want to tell



Marine Lance Corporal Timothy Dobos, center, is honored with a plaque presented by three Pennsylvania Patriot Guard Riders. His wife, Robyn, is to his right. At left, Dobos smiles as he speaks to friend and close mentor Dr. Anura Goonewardene, professor of physics at Lock Haven University.

LAKESHIA KNARR/
THE EXPRESS

you, you’re the reason we’re here.”

She said that while relatives live two to three hours away, the young family decided to stay in Lock Haven because of the tremendous community support and love they have found, especially at Common Place Church, and from STEP Head Start, LHU, Lycoming County Homemakers, VFW, Team RWB and HFOT.

“Our relationship with Homes For Our Troops is our greatest blessing,” Robyn continued, before she rewound.

The wife, mother and caretaker then described the beginning of their relationship.

Tim and Robyn met at Edinboro Church Camp when they were around middle school age.

“He was quiet ... I was kind of loud and silly,” she said. “I obviously fell in love with him.”

In 2011, they married at the same campground where they had met.

The couple moved to Lock Haven following Dobos’ honorable discharge from the Marines in 2012, and he began studying nanotechnology at LHU.

Only two short years later, after finding himself stumbling and tripping inexplicably, he was diagnosed with ALS, a progressive, neuromuscular disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord.

The disease has no cure. When diagnosed, many patients are told they have two to five years to live. The cause of ALS is not

known, but there seems to be a link between military service and the disease’s onset. The V.A. has reportedly determined that Dobos’ disease is service connected.

Robyn described his daily struggles, from basic tasks such as eating and hygiene to mobility.

“Right now, it’s impossible for him to get into our boys’ room for bedtime,” she said, noting the new mortgage-free home will allow them the financial freedom “to focus on making memories” despite the unknown future.

When Tim Dobos finally had a moment to speak, he was brief, but impactful.

“For a while, I wasn’t even sure if I deserved a house,” he said, describing ALS as “a very mysterious disease.”

He thanked HFOT and that’s when he shared his secret to perseverance.

“One of the things that keeps me going every day is ... something I say to myself every day, ‘do what

you can until you can’t.”

Speaking on behalf of Lock Haven City Council, council members Ted Forbes and Richard Conklin also recognized the young veteran and thanked him for his service, as did Katie Williard of MI Windows and Doors, a corporate sponsor for HFOT, and Tim McHale, HFOT president and CEO.

“We feel it’s a moral obligation of our society to take care of the men and women who have served and sacrificed, and Tim Dobos served and sacrificed,” McHale said, turning to Dobos. “Thank you.”

The family is hoping to be in their new home by Christmas.

Volunteers and donations are needed for the Dobos project and community members may hold fundraisers or make donations. To volunteer, email Community Outreach Coordinator Mary Espinoza at mespinoza@hfotusa.org. For more information, visit www.hfotusa.org/Dobos.

Around the Town



The Express office, 9-11 W. Main St., Lock Haven

Good day

And happy birthday to Reed Willar.

Word of the day

Broach — To bring up (a subject) for discussion or debate; to pierce (a keg) in order to draw off liquid; to shape or enlarge (a hole) with a tapered, serrated tool; a large ornamental pin or clasp; a spit for roasting meat; a mason’s narrow chisel.

Quote of the day

“No one has a greater asset for his business than a man’s pride in his work.”

— Hosea Ballou

Farmers market

The Clinton County Flea and Farmers Market is offered Tuesdays in May from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Clinton County Fairgrounds, 98 Racetrack Road, Mackeyville. Crafts, flea market items, seasonal fruits and vegetables, plants, food and more are sold. For more information, call 570-660-1231 or visit www.clintoncountyfairpa.com.

Bicycle rodeo

A bicycle rodeo, hosted by the Lock Haven Police Department, will be held Saturday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Robb Elementary School playground, 400 E. Church St. City police, the local school district, the county sheriff’s office, Lock Haven Emergency Medical Services and the fire department will participate. All children are encouraged to attend, with their parents, helmets and bikes on hand. There will be give-aways and other activities, including an obstacle/safety course, bicycle inspections and registrations.

Pa. Lottery SATURDAY Day

Pick 2: 8-7
Pick 3: 1-1-3
Pick 4: 9-3-7-6
Pick 5: 1-1-5-5-7
Treasure Hunt: 1-14-17-20-25

Evening

Pick 2: 7-5
Pick 3: 2-5-8
Pick 4: 2-9-1-2
Pick 5: 1-7-8-2-4
Cash 5: 8-14-24-32-37
Powerball: 5-7-9-23-32
Powerball: 26
Power Play: 4
\$80 million estimated jackpot (as of Sunday)

SUNDAY Day

Pick 2: 2-5
Pick 3: 5-2-2
Pick 4: 2-9-2-6
Pick 5: 7-0-8-1-6
Treasure Hunt: 1-8-9-23-28
\$40,000 estimated jackpot

Evening

Pick 2: 5-2
Pick 3: 5-2-8
Pick 4: 5-9-0-8
Pick 5: 5-2-1-0-1
Cash 5: 5-18-28-30-40
Estimated jackpot: \$125,000
Mega Millions estimated jackpot: \$203 million

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