

Project Independence:

Charity Begins at Home

Bath&Bar



By **LARISSA MICHAEL**
Volume Control

Photography Courtesy Project Independence



Standing in the airport last summer, waiting to board my flight, I witnessed something that touched my heart and changed my perspective forever. A little boy around the age of 7 or 8 tentatively approached a young man wearing his military fatigues. I watched as the child gently tugged at the soldier's jacket. When he saw the small boy he knelt down beside him. "Can I help you?" asked the soldier and the boy replied, "Where are you going?" "I'm going home" the soldier told him. At that moment the young boy put his arms around the soldier's neck and said, "Thank you for keeping my home safe."

A home is something that some of us take for granted; however, there are many individuals that do not have the means to obtain what we refer to as "The American Dream." One in four of the homeless population in the United States have worn a military uniform and served this country at one time, and 3% of them are women. The number of women veterans without housing is increasing daily and few homeless programs for veterans have facilities to provide separate accommodations for women, some of whom have children.

On Saturday September 11, 2010, a date none of us will forget, the Greater Houston Builders Association's Remodelors Council partnered with HomeAid Houston, to renovate five apartments with bathrooms and two common area bathrooms at the Santa Maria Hostel's Spring Branch location. Santa Maria

Hostel is a multi-site facility that offers temporary housing and different levels of service for women looking to change the direction of their lives. Serving both women and their children, Santa Maria is the largest center in the State of Texas and over the past five years has helped more than 5000 women.

Numerous men and women, who are members of the GHBA RMC, volunteered not only their time, but all of the materials used to refurbish the bathrooms that were in desperate need of a facelift. Remodelers, designers, vendors, and other associates came together in an effort to say thank you to our veterans. "Project Independence is a great way to give back to those women who have given so much of for this country and are struggling here at home to get back on their feet," said Brandon Lynch of Keechi Creek Builders, just one of the remodelers that stepped up to help.

The two week project began with demolition on "Camaraderie Day." While tearing down sheetrock, pulling out plumbing fixtures, and removing anything else that was left of the original bathrooms; the participants not only spent the day sweating, but they laughed, shared a meal, and got to know each other better. The GHBA RMC is an organization of remodelers and industry associates that are committed to professionalism and excellence. They are also involved in community outreach and charitable events such as Project Independence.

Wayne Ball, of Lone Star Building & Construction and president of the RMC expressed the sentiment of everyone participating, "It is mind-boggling to me that there is even one vet in America that is homeless!" Awareness is crucial and through the involvement of the media such news papers, TV, and magazines like HDR, the word was spread and the general public was given an opportunity to help. Bed Bath & Beyond set up a registry under HomeAid Houston so that people could purchase the items needed, such as bedding and bathroom linens. The list of contributors is long, from tile to plumbing to lighting, many have given. Labor made a huge impact; remodelers and their contractors, painters, and even designers answered the call to make a difference. Recognizing the importance of a beautiful environment, five interior designers went to work. "Women need a lovely space to live. I just wanted to add the touches that would bring the comfort of home to their room," commented Cindy Aplanalp, designer at By Design Interiors, Inc.

Upon completion, after the drapes had been hung and the last bed was made, a wave of joy washed over every person that gave for the women who gave of themselves for our country. Some cheered, some cried, but all realized that one of the greatest gifts they had ever received was the one they gave. Brad Carr of b-rad STUDIOS said it best, "I have come to appreciate the sacrifices being made by those men and women serving our country in the armed forces. It was an honor to contribute my time to something that means so much." ■

COORDINATING REMODELERS & ASSOCIATES INCLUDE:

- Phil Messarra**, MasterCraftsman, RMC Charity Chair
- Leslie King**, Greymark Construction, HomeAid Care Chair
- Wayne Ball**, Lone Star Building and Construction, RMC President
- Gil Boyles**, GB General Contractors, Inc
- John Gillette**, Craftsmanship by John, RMC Gov. Affairs Chair
- Gonzalo Garcia**, JRG Builder and Remodelers
- Bill Shaw**, William Shaw and Associates
- Rob Hellyer**, Premier Remodeling and Construction, LP, RMC Vice President
- Allen Griffin**, Gryphon Builders
- Beth Avalos**, Floors, Inc and HomeAid Care Design Coordinator
- Chelsea Morales**, By Design Interiors, Inc., Designer Coordinator
- Larissa Michael**, Volume Control, Public Relations & Media Coordinator

DESIGNERS INCLUDE:

- Peggy Fuller**, Kimberly Hanks and Cindy Aplanalp of By Design Interiors, Inc.
- Elizabeth Dinges**, Interior Design Studio
- Lynne Jones**, Lynne Jones Designs

VENDORS AND SUPPLIERS INCLUDE:

- Houston Design Resources Magazine
- b-rad STUDIOS
- C & C Floors
- CJ Permits
- Clean As A Whistle
- Cut-Rite Glass & Mirror
- D & R Signs
- Dennis Williams & Co, Inc.
- Ferguson Enterprises, Inc.
- Gulf and Basco
- Houston Permit Service
- Houston Shutters
- K2 Plumbing
- Lighting Unlimited
- The Mad Duster
- Mainland Custom Marble
- Master Tile
- 1-800-Mattress
- Mobile Modular
- On-Target Marketing
- Rainbow Painting
- Sherwin Williams Paint Company
- United Site Services
- Venetian Blind and Floor
- W.C. Contractors