

Mission accomplished: Glastonbury welcomes hero Manny Jimenez to his new home

By **Steve Smith - Staff Writer**
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Manny Jimenez (center) receives the 'key' to his new home on Addison Road from Purple Heart Homes founders John Gallina (left) and Dale Beatty at the ceremony on June 23. Photos by Steve Smith.

Manny Jimenez said his new home is not just wood, concrete, glass and materials, but the community of Glastonbury itself. Seemingly, the entire community was involved, one way or another, in helping to create the state-of-the-art home for Jimenez – a member of the U.S. Marines from New Britain, who was injured in Afghanistan in August of 2010.



The home was built by volunteers and coordinated by Purple Heart Homes, an organization founded by veterans John Gallina and Dale Beatty and which provides housing for wounded veterans. The town of Glastonbury had sold the land to Purple Heart Homes for the sum of \$1.

On June 23, Jimenez was welcomed to his new home on Addison Road, with a parade from nearby Smith Middle School and a ceremony attended by many of those involved in the project, as well as many of his new neighbors and well-wishers. "It's great," he said. "The support of community is outpouring. There's a lot of it. Even if there were speed bumps, none of them held or stopped the project along. I'm glad to be a new resident of the town of Glastonbury. Everybody did something, whether they donated a dollar to help pay for something, so everyone built this house as a town and as a community."

John Lord, past president of the Glastonbury Rotary Club, emceed the ceremony on the front porch of Jimenez's new home, and said the project is a "big deal" for Jimenez, the town, and volunteers.

Town Council Chairman Chip Beckett said Glastonbury has always helped its citizens, in both public and private efforts, and has a history of serving its veterans that dates back to before the Civil War. "Manny, thanks very much for joining our community," Beckett said, "and thank you to everyone who helped build this and make this a reality."

Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman thanked Purple Heart Homes, as well as Jimenez. "We could not have asked for more of a hero than you," Wyman told Jimenez. "We are so fortunate that you stayed here in Connecticut. The house is truly a gift for you, Manny, but you truly are a gift to us. You gave us the freedom that we have today."

U.S. Rep. John Larson (D-1) called the day a "quintessential moment of Americana."

“Today, Glastonbury stands tall and proud in its recognition of Manny Jimenez,” he said, “and a great tribute in what everyone around the nation should follow as an exemplary way of treating its veterans.”

Gallina said his organization heard about Jimenez through another non-profit organization and got to know him, learning that he was certainly worthy of their assistance. The objective of Purple Heart Homes, he said, is to set up veterans for future success, “so that they can look forward and not have to look backward... so that they can look forward to how they can become an integral part of their community so that they can continue to give from the life-long lessons they have learned in their military training and the experiences that they've brought home from them.”

Jimenez said his future plans include continuing his education and pursuing a career as a physical education teacher, preferably in Glastonbury.

Representatives from Smith Middle School said they would welcome Jimenez there, as he has already been part of presentations there. Teacher Tim Neville said the school was involved with the project, and students held several events and fundraisers for the effort, and several discussions have been held, in conjunction, about veterans and community support. The school also presented Jimenez with the gift of a patriotically-decorated chair for his front porch.

“It's so hometown and it's so right,” said Smith Principal Donna Schilke, of the event.

Jimenez fought tears as he accepted the key to his new home. “I want to thank the town of Glastonbury for taking on this project, and the Rotary for putting this on their shoulders for making a well-run machine go as smoothly as possible,” Jimenez said, adding that he had support from his family since his life-changing injury.

“Once I got hurt, my mom pretty much dropped everything and came to my bedside,” he said, adding that he has stayed at his mother's home since leaving the hospital.

“Now that I'm leaving [there],” he said, “I have the support of the town of Glastonbury, which has joined my family.”