

LONG ISLAND / SUFFOLK

A new home in Medford is one less worry for Marine Corps vet



Lt. Gov. Brian Benjamin shakes hands with Vincent Ross on Tuesday on the porch of the disabled Marine Corps veteran's new home in Medford. Credit: Raychel Brightman

By John Asbury

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For the past two years Vincent Ross lived in Long Island hotels, often unsure about where he would spend the next night.

Last month, a life of uncertainty and stress came to an end for the disabled Marine Corps veteran who served in Japan and Lebanon from 1981-1988.

Ross, 57, moved into a new Medford home he can call his own, courtesy of Suffolk County, with construction overseen by the Association for Mental Health and Wellness. He will share the home with two other former service members under a county grant program for homeless veterans.

"The first thing they said to me was consider this your home. They didn't just say it. They meant it. I've felt nothing but family," Ross said in front of his new Hawkins Avenue residence. "It's good to know someone cares and interested in my well-being and not just treated as a number or a rent receipt."

The Medford home is one of three built as part of a \$2.4 million project to house homeless or formerly homeless veterans in Suffolk County.

The other homes were built in Riverhead and Mastic. The former zombie properties were acquired by Suffolk through foreclosure or abandonment. The properties were then transferred to nonprofit organizations under the county's Housing Our Homeless Heroes Act, and funded through New York State Temporary and Disability Assistance, officials said.

The foreclosed houses were demolished and construction crews from the United Way built the new homes, with heat from geothermal power provided by National Grid.

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Lt. Gov. Brian Benjamin, who attended the ribbon cutting for the Medford home Tuesday, said Suffolk County has served as a model for housing veterans.

"If it wasn't for veterans and those who serve and protect us, we would not be able to have the life we have right now. It's only right we do everything we can when they come home so they never be labeled homeless. It's sickening to even have the term, 'homeless veterans,'" Benjamin said. "How can we live in the wealthiest state and wealthiest country in the world and have homeless veterans? It doesn't make any sense whatsoever. They deserve the best we have because we wouldn't have our homes without them."

The Riverhead home was awarded to Ashanta Murray, 36, a U.S. Navy veteran of eight years and mother of three.

"These homes for my children have been such a blessing. I was so proud to serve in the Navy and to come home and trying to find housing was such a struggle," Murray said. "To serve your country and come home to face homelessness should never happen. I knew I'd have a home for my children, but I never thought it would be so beautiful."

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