



HELPING A HERO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Bass Pro Shops Founder Johnny Morris Surprises Wounded Veterans With Gift of 10 Specially Adapted Homes Through Helping a Hero**

***Announces challenge grant to support additional 100 NEW HOMES for  
severely wounded veterans***



**SPRINGFIELD, Mo.** – Noted conservationist and Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris joined with Helping a Hero to award a home to a deserving amputee, Marine Sergeant Joe Bartel of Aberdeen, North Carolina, as well as to pay the mortgage for Army Staff Sergeant Daniel Barnes of Waynesville, Missouri. Originally Morris pledged 10 new specially adapted homes in May through the Helping a Hero organization. **Johnny Morris made a surprise announcement that Bass Pro Shops will cover 25 percent of funding for the next 100 donated homes to encourage Americans to get involved in Helping a Hero's Wounded Hero Home Program.**

Veterans and their families gathered Thursday at Bass Pro Shops National Headquarters Store in Springfield, Missouri for the surprise announcement. This week, the families had the opportunity to visit the “Granddaddy” Headquarters Store along with Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium and Big Cedar Lodge.

Morris officially presented the key to the first adapted home funded through the Johnny Morris and Bass Pro Shops donations to Bartel and his family of six in front of a national TV audience. The announcement led to tears and emotional reactions.

“Helping a Hero is an awesome organization,” said Bass Pro Shops Founder Johnny Morris. “When I hear the words to Helping a Hero’s national ambassador Lee Greenwood’s ‘God Bless the USA,’ every word of that song hits home and reminds us how lucky we are to be able to call America our home. We’re coming up on our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Bass Pro Shops, and it wouldn’t be possible if it weren’t for those who have defended our freedoms and those who support conservation. My Dad was in World War II in the Battle of the Bulge, and my friend Emil Martinka served in World War II as well and has been with our company for many years now.”

“It’s humbling, and a great honor to host the veterans we have here with us today,” Morris continued. “We can never do enough to thank these families and all of our veterans who defend our freedoms. They mean everything to us and we’re very grateful. That’s not just from me, it’s everyone in our company and the outdoor community we serve. We’re all very proud to salute our veterans. We’re proud – everybody from Helping a Hero and from Bass Pro – to present Sargeant Bartel and his family with a new home and to support Staff Sargeant Daniel Barnes, from right here in our home state of Missouri, by paying off the mortgage on his new home. We would also like to pledge to chip in 25 percent for the next 100 homes and challenge people and encourage others to get involved with the Helping a Hero home program.”

### **Making an Appeal to Americans to Join the Cause**

Morris and Bass Pro Shops have launched a nationwide challenge to inspire and encourage Americans to support and make a difference in the lives of our nation’s heroes. Individuals and businesses can get involved by visiting [HelpingaHero.org](http://HelpingaHero.org).

In May, Helping a Hero launched a Nominate a Wounded Hero program and accepted nominations of deserving wounded heroes whose injuries require an adapted home to regain their daily independence. In addition to the nomination of Bartel that led to his selection, College of the Ozarks nominated Missouri hero, SSG Barnes.

“Receiving this home is like a dream come true,” said Marine Sgt Joe Bartel. “As an amputee I have struggled to do daily tasks including taking a shower independently. Having a home with wider doors, a roll in shower and other features will change my life. I will finally have complete independence through this Helping a Hero home and it will give my wife peace of mind when she isn’t there to help me.”

“This incredible and unexpected gift reminds me that America is the greatest nation in the world,” said SSG Daniel Barnes, USA (Ret). “When I fought to protect our freedom and protect our way of life, I never expected someone to pay off my mortgage and help my family have this huge burden lifted from our shoulders. My wife Gretchen and I are speechless and overwhelmed with joy. Words can’t express how we feel and our gratitude for Johnny and people like him that do so much for veterans.”



*Earlier this week, Bass Pro Shops hosted these special veterans and their families who enjoyed time in the Ozarks at Big Cedar Lodge. The group visited the Lost Canyon Cave and Nature Trail at Top of the Rock, where this photo was taken at sunset.*

**Sgt Joe Bartel, USMC (Ret)** – In 2003, Bartel deployed to Iraq in the initial invasion where his team marched to Baghdad. Their intense tour of duty lasted nine months. They cleared buildings, battled Saddam’s Army and Al Qaeda. When Bartel returned home, he struggled with survivors’ guilt, but he still felt the call to serve and to protect the freedom he wanted for his family.

Bartel decided to join the Army and deployed to Iraq as part of the surge. He was a dismounted team leader in the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID of the Bradley unit. They lost fellow soldiers and friends daily. They were outside the wire almost every day and IEDs were always a threat. It had only been a few months when his life changed. Bartel and his Bradley unit were heading out for another mission. He was inside the Bradley in 110-degree heat where the team often took off their helmet or loosened their protective vest as the heat was overwhelming. That day, he felt God tell him “Put on your gear...NOW.” He immediately told his team to gear up and within seconds of securing the gear in place, the Bradley hit an anti-tank mine and Bartel was thrown against the back door and blacked out instantly. He awoke to learn he had lost his leg and that he would have died had he not had his helmet secured on his head.

**SSG Daniel Barnes, USA (Ret)** – The Barnes family attended the event Thursday thinking they were supporting other wounded warriors and had no idea they would receive the news that Morris would pay their outstanding mortgage on their new home in full.

Barnes joined the U.S. Army in October 1995 and attended basic training in Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. His first duty station was the 8<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion in Fort Hood, Texas. He served in Kuwait and Korea before returning to Fort Hood and marrying his wife, Gretchen. In 2003, he deployed to Iraq for a year tour of duty with the 5<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion. In November 2005, Barnes deployed again to Iraq with 5<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion. On September 4, 2006, while on a night route-clearance mission, Barnes’ RG-31 mine protected vehicle was struck with a Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG). Barnes was the tank commander traveling in the passenger seat when he lost both legs. His soldiers in the convoy applied tourniquets to both legs which saved his life. Within an hour, MEDIVAC arrived, and he was flown by Blackhawk to the 10<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Hospital in Baghdad, transferred to Balad Hospital and then to Landstuhl. Once he was stable and both legs were amputated, he was hospitalized at Brooke Army Medical Center in the Intensive Care Unit for two weeks. He completed his service at Brooke Army Medical Center Wounded Warrior Battalion in December 2007 and medically retired from the Army on January 27, 2008.

Barnes served in the Army over 12 years, and his military awards include: two Bronze Stars, a Purple Heart, five Army Commendation Medals, five Army Achievement Medals, Joint Meritorious Unit Award, four Army Good Conduct Awards, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, and the Iraq Campaign Medal.

### **Helping a Hero**

“Helping a Hero exists to serve our wounded warriors,” **echoed Meredith Iler, chairman emeritus of Helping a Hero and the founder of its home program.** “When patriots like Johnny step up and commit to change over 100 wounded warriors’ lives, it is inspiring. Leadership and generosity like this reminds us that patriotism is alive and well. This is also a lesson that we need to share with the next generation.” Helping a Hero is a nonprofit organization that provides support for military personnel severely injured in the Global War on Terror. Helping a Hero’s primary mission is to provide specially adapted homes for qualifying service members through partnerships made with the builders, developers, communities and the veteran. It strives to engage the community in providing services and resources for our wounded heroes and their families.

### **Commitment to Veterans**

Bass Pro Shops has a strong affinity for the armed forces and their families, a value that starts with our visionary founder Johnny Morris. His lifelong respect and gratitude to servicemen and women was strongly shaped by his father, John A. Morris, a decorated World War II veteran who proudly served his country in the Battle of the Bulge.

Thursday’s announcement is the latest in several ways Johnny and Bass Pro Shops supports our military and veterans. In 2011, Morris was awarded the prestigious Order of Saint Maurice by the National Infantry Association in support of his outstanding contributions to the Army Infantry. Other key initiatives include:

- **Donating \$1.5 million to establish a series of memorials honoring heroes** at the College of the Ozarks campus in nearby Hollister, Missouri, including a Vietnam War Memorial, Gold Star Families Memorial and Korean War Memorial.
- **Recruiting veterans to join Bass Pro Shops**, with nearly 10 percent of team members comprised of veterans.
- **Hosting events that help recovering veterans connect with nature**, including Fishing Dreams, special fishing tournaments for disabled veterans that take place on Table Rock Lake.
- **Raising awareness for veterans’ issues** by hosting *Portraits of Courage: A Commander in Chief’s Tribute to America’s Warriors* at the Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium in Springfield, Missouri. The powerful exhibition, on loan from the George W Bush Institute in 2018, highlights America’s military veterans and directs attention to organizations supporting them every day.
- **Offering an everyday “Legendary Salute” military discount** in all Bass Pro Shops and Cabela’s stores, with more than a million discounted transactions in the past year alone.
- **Donating generously to AmVets, USO and other not-for-profit veterans’ support organizations** that provide direct assistance to active military, veterans and their families.
- **Showcasing veterans’ causes at NASCAR races by donating space on several race cars** during nationally televised races with millions of viewers.

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### **About Helping a Hero**

*Helping a Hero is a 501(c)(3) organization based in Texas that has awarded over 100 homes in 23 states to our most severely wounded warriors injured in the Global War on Terror. Helping a Hero is certified by the Better Business Bureau as a transparent and accountable charity and was also one of 12 charities selected by the BBB for the "Award of Distinction" in 2017. Applications are being accepted for 2021 and 2022 homes.*

### **About Bass Pro Shops**

*Bass Pro Shops is North America's premier outdoor and conservation company. Founded in 1972 when avid young angler Johnny Morris began selling tackle out of his father's liquor store in Springfield, Missouri, today the company provides customers with unmatched offerings spanning premier destination retail, outdoor equipment manufacturing, world-class resort destinations and more. In 2017 Bass Pro Shops acquired Cabela's to create a "best-of-the-best" experience with superior products, dynamic locations and outstanding customer service. Bass Pro Shops also operates White River Marine Group, offering an unsurpassed collection of industry-leading boat brands, and Big Cedar Lodge, America's Premier Wilderness Resort. Under the visionary conservation leadership of Johnny Morris, Bass Pro Shops is a national leader in protecting habitat and introducing families to the outdoors and has been named by Forbes as "one of America's Best Employers."*

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