A large crowd gathered for an open house in honor of Gary Bright, center, Feb. 29 in The Buffalo subdivision near Como. With Bright are those most responsible for initiating construction of Bright’s new home, Patty Pugliese, left, and Jim Dexter. Pugliese and Dexter became aware of Bright’s struggles about two years ago and have since worked with hundreds of volunteers to construct a new home for the U.S. Navy veteran.

When asked what he learned from orchestrating the events that led to the open house, Dexter said, “I learned that you can’t rush volunteers, and that you probably shouldn’t let them drink on the job.”

“No, honestly, this just reaffirmed for me that the Lord will provide. Every single time we started to think we were there, Patty and I said a little prayer together about 20 months ago, and from there it took on a life of its own.”

Pugliese agreed.

“Gary had been fighting eye troubles due to blood clots, and at one time his oxygen levels were dangerously low,” she said.

“I came out to visit him at Christmas and he did not look good, so we got him to the hospital. It turned out that his oxygen levels were down around 62, and he might not have survived had he not gotten some attention. For a lot of reasons, I think there was a purpose for me being there.”

Pugliese added that Bright has seemingly improved emotionally as well as physically thanks to his improved circumstances.

“When he makes a phone call, he’s been talking to relatives that he previously hadn’t talked to in years. They were surprised to see him, and he was surprised to see them.”

Pugliese described how hefirst referred to as “an amazing string of events” that led to getting Bright the help he needed.

“Now that he has a phone, he has been talking to relatives that he previously hadn’t talked to in years. They were surprised to see him, and he was surprised to see them.”

Pugliese described how Bright has seemingly improved emotionally as well as physically thanks to his improved circumstances.

“Gary is not a city guy at all, and he chose this location for a reason. But we built a report over time, and he is very deserving. So this entire process has been very rewarding to say the least.”

Dexter added that because of the generosity of so many, Bright’s new home was constructed at a liquid cash cost of about $22,000.

‘A long time coming’

Como community rallies to build home for local veteran

by Kelly Kirkpatrick

Flume Staff Writer

Gary Bright’s new home in the Como area features heated floors, modern appliances, a comfortable recliner, an American flag on the front porch and a glorious view that seemingly goes on forever.

But it hasn’t always been that way.

Bright is a longtime resident of the South Park area and a U.S. Navy veteran. He worked for years as a chef in Fairplay, and purchased 10 acres in The Buffalo subdivision in 1988. That stunningly scenic property for more than three decades. His primitive living quarters lacked running water, electricity, adequate heat and all the other amenities commonly found in modern times.

By 2018, the 73-year-old veteran had a number of deteriorating health issues that prompted need for immediate medical attention. Meanwhile, his living arrangements exacerbated the situation and didn’t bode well for his future prospects for good health.

Father Patty Pugliese and Jim Dexter, who learned of Bright’s situation about two years ago. As it turned out, their combination of compassion and can-do optimism was just what the doctor ordered for Bright.

Twenty months later, due to efforts on the part of Pugliese and Dexters, as well as those of some 200 volunteers, a new home was built on Bright’s property, where an open house ceremony was held Feb. 29 to mark the occasion.

“I was managing Family Dollar in Fairplay, and Gary was a regular customer there,” said longtime Fairplay resident Pugliese. “I didn’t see him at the store for a while, and then he came in and said he had been in the hospital. I knew he was in need of help and contactedJim, who is commander of American Legions in District 12.”

Dexter has been a member of the American Legion for 26 years. As District 12 commander, he oversees operations of five posts in Bailey, Buena Vista, Breckenridge, Fairplay and Salida.

Dexter pulled together a team of local veterans, contacted other veterans in Texas, Arizona and Florida, then proceeded to gather volunteers to assist in giving Bright the help he needed.

“Patty came into my office on a Thursday about 20 months ago,” Dexter said. “From there, it was just an incredible story of how hundreds of people from all parts of the country pitched in to help Gary.”

Grants to Grand County Veterans of Post 88, necessary cash was obtained to have permanent electricity placed on the property. That task also required heavy digging equipment that Dexter said was generously provided by Buena Vista Rentals.

The list of those who assisted in helping Bright is long. Some, but not all of the area entities paving the way for Bright’s new home included: Park County commissioners, Park County Building Department, Craig Nail Construction in Loveland, Greer’s Appliance in Silverthorne, Fine Line Construction in Spring, Texas, Breckenridge Building Center, Lowes in Silverthorne, Ferguson Enterprises in Silverthorne, George T. Sanders of Silverthorne and Jefferson-Como Firehouse No. 5.

Firehouse No. 5 also provided a color guard for the open house celebration, and American flags lined the driveway throughout the day.

After Dexter and Pugliese each spoke briefly to those in attendance, well-wishers mingled and took turns congratulating Bright.

“It’s a pretty good day today,” Bright said. “I had no idea this would happen … I never expected this at all … but it’s been a long time coming.”

Dexter described what he referred to as “an amazing string of events” that led to getting Bright the help he needed.

“When we first came out here, Gary was pretty crabby and he wanted to know why we were here and what we wanted,” Dexter recalled.

“Gary is not a city guy at all, and he chose this location for a reason. But we built a report over time, and he is very deserving. So this entire process has been very rewarding to say the least.”

Dexter added that because of the generosity of so many, Bright’s new home was constructed at a liquid cash cost of about $22,000.

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