

A Gift of a Pool for Heroic Young Man



We all need inspiration from time to time. Let us tell you about a young man we at the Metro Chapter of New York and New Jersey had the honor to meet. His story will inspire you, just as it touched our chapter deeply.

His name is Brian Brennan of Howell, New Jersey. Brian grew up in the town and attended Howell High School. He was captain of the football team and a star player.

After high school, Brian attended The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina. The Citadel is a military school best known nationally for its Corps of Cadets, which draws students from about 40 states and a dozen countries. Brian emerged as the commander of his class.

He joined the U.S. Army, and 1st Lt. Brennan went to war in Afghanistan to fight an enemy that attacked the U.S. on 9/11. Lt. Brennan had only been in this far-off country for two months when the 23-year-old was leading a patrol on May 7, 2008. His vehicle hit an IED (improvised explosive device). It exploded under his Humvee. Everyone in the Humvee was killed except for Lt. Brennan and his gunner, Spc. Ryan Price of California. Lt. Brennan and Spc. Price had been roommates at The Citadel in their senior year.

There was a sand storm under way and the army was not able to send in a rescue helicopter. That, however, did not keep

fellow soldiers from rescuing their severely injured comrades. Lt. Brennan was found in cardiac arrest. If not for the quick response of his fellow soldiers, his story might have had a different ending. He was transferred to a field hospital, where it was found that he had sustained an acute brain injury, a collapsed lung, internal bleeding, a ruptured spleen, multiple compound fractures of his left arm and a shattered femur bone. In addition, both of his legs had to be amputated. It is truly a miracle that he survived these injuries.

Lt. Brennan was flown from Afghanistan to Germany and then on to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. His family stayed with him around the clock. Lt. Brennan remained in a coma for several weeks as he underwent multiple surgeries to keep infection away from his legs and to repair his broken bones.

A GENERAL VISITS

Despite the best efforts of his family talking to him and singing to him, Lt. Brennan remained in a coma. Then something

extraordinary happened. While still at Walter Reed, he received a visit from General David Petraeus, who in April of that year had been nominated by Defense Secretary Robert Gates to command U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM). Lt. Brennan was unresponsive to Gen. Petraeus until the general uttered the battle cry “Currahee!” (Cherokee for “We Stand Alone.”), a motto of the famed “Band of Brothers” Regiment, the nickname of Lt. Brennan’s unit. With that Lt. Brennan responded to the general and sat up in bed as best he could.

Once Lt. Brennan regained consciousness he was transferred to James A. Haley Veterans Hospital in Tampa, Florida, which specializes in traumatic brain injuries, to begin his rehabilitation. He was fitted with prosthetics. He has made remarkable strides in his recovery due to his determination and positive attitude, but he has a long rehabilitative process ahead of him. Because of his extraordinarily positive attitude, the Tampa hospital wanted to hire him to work with other returning veterans suffering traumatic injury.

METRO CHAPTER LENDS A HELPING HAND

The Metro Chapter and NESPA became acquainted with Lt. Brennan’s story in November 2008, while attending the Central Jersey Code Enforcer’s Association (CJCEA) luncheon. The group had gotten together and torn down the Brennan family garage and built a handicap accessible bachelor’s pad for Lt. Brennan. Jack McNaboe, an official with CJCEA, asked Metro Chapter members at the luncheon if we could build a therapy pool for Brian’s continued rehabilitation. Metro responded immediately.

The next day we presented to the Metro Chapter Board the idea of the chapter building a pool. There was an immediate outpouring of donations from the board, chapter members and others from all around the country. We had about 75 percent of the products we needed within three or four days. We found a local builder who could do the labor for us. At that point it was a done deal because whatever was still needed the chapter could fill in and complete. It happened very fast; our people stood up and did the right thing immediately. It got to the point where we had to turn down equipment because there were duplications. Everyone in our chapter was a participant in one way or another. When someone is down, people will step in and help. This was obvious to us.

What we created was an 18 x 36 steel-walled vinyl liner pool. It has regular steps in it and a loveseat, or swim-out, in the deep end. It goes from three-and-a-half to five-and-a-half feet. There is no diving board. It has electronic digital remote controls, a heater, a variable speed pump, a chlorine generator and color lighting. The whole pool is built green, so it is all energy efficient. It will save the family money over the long run. It also has a handicapped lift chair for easy access.

Lt. Brennan has been working at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C., with different sets of prosthetics legs because in the attack, he lost one leg above the knee, the other below the knee. He has prosthetics that he uses for walking and a set he uses for running when he competes in athletic events. He has a third set for swimming because a body’s buoyancy is changed in the absence of legs. Although Lt. Brennan intends to enter and



Top row, from left: BJ DiGioia, Dominic DiGioia, Robert Blanda and Steve Gorlin. Bottom row, from left: Jack McNaboe, Brian Brennan and Brian’s father, Jim.

exit the pool using the stairs, the handicapped lift is an excellent way for him to invite other returning veterans over for a swim who may need the lift.

The whole effort was truly unbelievable. The best part for us was meeting Lt. Brennan, his mom, his dad and his brother and sister.

Following is a list of the companies or individuals who made this project happen. We are deeply thankful to them:

- The Metro Chapter of New York and New Jersey
- NESPA
- Steve Gorlin, Chairman of the Committee
- Digioia Construction: Excavation, Installation, Backfill
- Seaboard Industries: Pool Kit
- B & B Pools: Pool Kit
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- Jetline Distributors: Swim-Out and misc items
- Bel-Aqua: All Plastic
- Merlin Industries: Liner
- Electric Experts: Electrical Installation Labor
- Suffolk Concrete: Cement for Collar And Deck
- Mr. Pools + Masonry: Labor for Deck
- Good Friend Electric: All Electric Material
- East Coast Pool Products: Solar Cover and Maintenance Equipment
- S.R.Smith: Rails and Ladders
- Latham International: Swim-Out
- Custom Pool Safety: Meyco Winter Cover
- Pentair Water Pool and Spa: Equipment – filter, pump, heater, lights, controls
- Hayward Industries: Skimmers, Main Drains, Wall Fittings
- Rehamed International: Chair Lift
- SCP-Lakewood: Vermiculite and Cement
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- CMI Industries: Bonding Grid |

Robert Blanda, CBP, CSP, CPO, is past president of the Metro Chapter of New York and New Jersey, chairman of APSP’s Builder’s Council, secretary of NESPA and president of Mill Bergen Pools, Brooklyn, NY.

Steve Gorlin, CBP, CSP, CPO, is chairman of APSP’s Hot Tub Council, national director Region I, and president of Gorlin Pools, Toms River, New Jersey.