

Designing Spaces to renovate local veteran's home

By Kristina Schwartz
Okeechobee News

One fortuitous Marine, recipient of a Purple Heart, will receive a home renovation from Designing Spaces®, a home improvement show airing on Lifetime TV.

1st Lt. Robert M. Keefe Jr. enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in February 2001 and completed his recruit training at Parris Island. Following recruit training, he completed various Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) training courses to become a reconnaissance marine, subsequently being assigned to 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa, Japan.

Following Basic School and Logistics Officer Course, Lt. Keefe was assigned to Combat Logistics Battalion 2, Combat Logistics Regiment 2, in November 2009. Lt. Keefe

served as a platoon commander for a truck platoon during the battalion's deployment to Afghanistan from July 2010 to February 2011. During the deployment, his Humvee hit an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), causing severe spinal injuries which rendered him unable to continue military service. In addition to the T12/L1 vertebrae compression fracture and traumatic brain injury, Lt. Keefe also sustained PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and memory loss. He medically separated from the service on Nov. 29, 2012 and continues to serve — through any capacity possible — as a veteran advocate, volunteer, mentor and public speaker.

Lt. Keefe's personal decorations include the Purple Heart, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal and Good Conduct Medal with Bronze Star.

Designing Spaces® has joined efforts with the Wounded Warriors of South Florida to

renovate Lt. Keefe's home, and will be in Okeechobee filming their four-part television series "Designing Spaces of Hope — Military Makeover" the week of March 23-27 with the renovations of the completed home unveiled to the Keefe family on Friday, March 27. Hosting the series for a second time will be R. Lee Erney, the "Gunny," best known for his TV and movie career which has spanned over three decades. His breakout role came in 1987, when he portrayed the tough drill instructor Gunnery Sergeant Hartman in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*. Gunny Erney is a retired United States Marine Corps Staff Sergeant and drill instructor.

Designing Spaces®, Erney, Wounded Warriors of South Florida and valued sponsors are dedicated to giving back to our military and assisting veterans and their families in dire need of improved housing solutions.

Lt. Keefe is married to the former Bianca Padgett of Managua, Nicaragua. They live in Okeechobee and have three children, Zane and Leah, 10, and Ricky, 5.



Special to the Okeechobee News
First Lieutenant Robert M. Keefe Jr. and wife Bianca are pictured at Silver Palms RV Resort in Okeechobee. Lt. Keefe was invited to give a speech on Veterans Day. This is just one example of the many ways that Lt. Keefe continues to serve the Marine Corps even after sustaining injuries in Afghanistan.



Okeechobee News/Katrina Elsen

Children's Week

Okeechobee County Commission Chairman Frank Irby presented a proclamation to Jackie Jackson, executive director, Early Learning Coalition of Indian River, Martin and Okeechobee counties, to designate April 12-17 as Annual Children's Week, celebrating and children. "Currently we serve 326 children in Okeechobee County," Mrs. Jackson said. There are 176 children on the waiting list. Funding is always an issue."

Project Prom to be held

Project Prom by the B.R.A.T. Club is in search of donations of dresses, shoes, suits, etc. for the upcoming 2015 prom and other dances. Any size and any length is accepted. A day will be held for students to pick up a dress or suit for prom. All Students need to get a dress or suit is a student ID or current report card. Drop off donations at the Okeechobee News, 107 S.W. 17th St., (behind Dominos). For more information, call Tammi at 772-708-6764.

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With the Doctor
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Lecture: 5:00pm (free)
RSVP: 763.9228

Winner for OREA drawing

Congratulations are in store for Crystal Rhoden of Okeechobee, who was the lucky winner of the Kindle Fire HD6 that was in a drawing by the Okeechobee Retired Educators during the Speckled Perch Festival. The proceeds

of the drawing will go to help fund the OREA Scholarships and other OREA projects. Thanks to everyone who supported us by purchasing a ticket. Pictured are Gay Carlton, president of OREA; Crystal Rhoden and her two children, and Verna Van Deman of OREA.



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