



Retired Staff Sgt. R. Lee Erme surveys the film crew in between shots for the Designing Spaces of Hope — Military Makeover. Staff Sgt. Erme is a retired drill instructor and has had numerous military and authoritative roles across a vast array of movies and tv shows, including on screen performances and voice-overs. Photo credit: Special to the Okeechobee News/Pamela Steele-Unger.

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OKEECHOBEE — “The Marine Corp retired me in 1971, and I just kept showing up for work,” said R. Lee Erme, retired US Marine Corps Staff Sergeant, drill instructor and host of Designing Spaces of Hope — Military Makeover.

He does everything he can to help the Marine Corps and military. He’s been to Afghanistan four times and in November, he speaks at the Marine Corps birthday balls and in December, he does Toys for Tots. “It gives me something to do, and I support the troops.”

Staff Sgt. Erme has come to town with the TV crew of Designing Spaces™ to renovate the home of local Purple Heart veteran Lt. Robert Keefe.

Lt. Keefe's home is the third time that Staff Sgt. Ermey has been involved with renovating a veteran's home, but home renovation isn't the only task with which the Marines can help. For instance, if someone's spouse is in a war zone and they need new tires on their car or if the roof is leaking, they can call the Marines for help.

"I've just always been involved," said Staff Sgt. Ermey. "I stayed involved with the military. The Commandant asked me to go to Afghanistan, and I packed my gear. I've been working with the military for 53 years, and I'll do it 'til I die because they're very deserving people."

Staff Sgt. Ermey and Designing Spaces™ were contacted by Wounded Warriors of South Florida, which provides a wide range of financial assistance to meet the needs of eligible disabled veterans. Wounded Warriors of South Florida explained what they'd like to do for Lt. Keefe, and Staff Sgt. Ermey and the TV crew were more than happy to help.

According to Staff Sgt. Ermey, the house has been "gutted. We're tearing everything out of the house." Landscaping is being done as well, and the final reveal of the renovation will be shown in the four-part series Designing Spaces of Hope — Military Makeover, airing on Lifetime in May.

Around August, they'll be doing another home renovation.

"This is just a small token to let them know: Hey, we do appreciate what you do," explained Staff Sgt. Ermey.

Their resources can't be stretched to do this for every veteran, but they're helping as many as they possibly can, and Staff Sgt. Ermey feels it's important to let the others know they care.

He had the chance to tour a little bit of Okeechobee and complimented the military tributes in Flagler Park.

He was also fairly impressed with Lt. Keefe's neighbors.

"Instead of complaining about not having access to their driveways, (they) volunteered to help us with the project. They picked up a hammer and went to work," he said.

Staff Sgt. Ermey has had a successful acting career that has spanned the decades. His breakout role came in Stanley Kubrik's Full Metal Jacket in 1987. He has also been a host for several documentary series on The History Channel.

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