



## **Virginia REALTORS® Partner with “Homes for Our Troops” to Help Injured Veterans Get Mortgage-Free Housing—October 2015**

Every other year, REALTORS® of diverse experience, perspective, personal heritage, and geography come together to participate in an elite Leadership Academy hosted by the Virginia Association of REALTORS® (VAR). This year, a \$5,000 Diversity Grant from the REALTOR® Party supported the program, and in the spirit of honoring diversity in their communities as well as their industry, the class committed to helping a segment of the population with special meaning to the Commonwealth: injured veterans.

"The 2015 class identified injured veterans as a constituency with inherent diversity and, in many cases, unique housing needs," notes Deborah A. Baisden, 2015 President of the Virginia Association of REALTORS®. "They face challenges that could be marginalizing without the support that comes from REALTORS® and other community leaders committed to inclusion in housing and society," she adds.

Nearly one-in-ten residents of Virginia is a veteran or an active member of the nation's armed services. When the 19 members of this year's Leadership Academy class were deliberating over what sort of project would form a significant component of their curriculum, it became clear that each of them had been touched by a relationship with a veteran, personally or professionally, on the buy- or the sell-side. "Virginia is one of the top recipients of defense spending in the U.S.," Baisden explains, "and we're all honored to have such a strong presence of brave men and women who have chosen to serve their country this way."

The class project is a bonding experience for Leadership Academy classmates who conceive the idea at their first retreat in April; implement it over the course of the spring and summer; and present it to VAR's delegate body at the association's annual meeting in October.

For its chosen project, the 2015 class launched an ambitious fundraising effort to benefit Homes for Our Troops (HFOT), a non-profit organization that constructs specially adapted, mortgage-free houses for severely injured post-9/11 veterans. In just 12 weeks, the class had raised over \$50,000 by reaching out to their own local boards for grants, and by appealing directly to individual colleagues and friends. With additional support from the VAR board, the class has pledged a total of \$62,000 to HFOT.

"The passion that this class has for this cause is just spectacular," says Baisden. "It really exemplifies the role and the value of REALTORS® in their communities." In fact, this has become something much bigger than a finite Leadership Academy project, she reports. Although it will not be officially 'complete' until it is presented to the VAR delegate body when it meets in Williamsburg this month, because of the overwhelming enthusiasm of its members, VAR has undertaken to extend its corporate partnership of HFOT into a second year, at least. According to Baisden, the cause has become a real rallying point for REALTORS® in Virginia. The association has been holding online fundraising petitions for HFOT around patriotic holidays, and accepts donations as low



as a single dollar. With three active builds in the commonwealth, and two more in the pipeline, HFOT will be offering volunteer opportunities for VAR members who are looking to provide hands-on help, too.

"Fundraising is just the first goal of our partnership with HFOT," says Baisden, "but raising awareness is as important." Based on its experience working with the REALTORS® of Virginia, she adds, HFOT is working hard to cultivate the support of other REALTOR® associations: look for them presenting as a vendor at the upcoming National Convention in San Diego.

*To learn more about how Virginia REALTORS® have embraced diversity and housing opportunity at a whole new level, contact Jenny Wortham, Director of Community Outreach for the Virginia Association of REALTORS® at [jenny@varealtor.com](mailto:jenny@varealtor.com) or 804.262.3755.*



The Virginia Association's Leadership Academy partners with "Homes for Our Troops" to help build mortgage-free/accessible homes for injured veterans