

HOME from A1

community to each share what little they can to cook a meal.

"This is exactly a 'Stone Soup' project because it started off with just one man - Jason [Bush] - and an idea," he said.

Jayson is a disabled veteran of the Iraq War. He had already served in the U.S. Marine Corps when he chose to answer President George Bush's call for a troop surge in the Iraq War - and at 34 years old, he went overseas as an infantry medic.

While serving, Jayson suffered several injuries at numerous locations over his body.

As a result, Jayson has had dozens of surgeries related to his injuries and continues to have extreme nerve pain - pain so intense he has had bouts of vomiting, he said. He also has an implanted spinal cord stimulator which sends electrical impulses to outpace the pain signals to his brain.

After a lengthy reckoning with Jayson's condition, Jayson and Misty found solace in launching their own business, SouthPaws LLC, which trains service dogs to meet the needs of their clients.

Jayson has also logged hundreds of hours to peer mentoring with the Veterans Treatment Court, a specialty court which helps set veterans on more productive paths if they are in legal trouble due to mental disorders or drug addictions.

However, tragedy struck when the 2019 snowstorm brought four trees down onto the Southmayds' home, unhousing the family.

It would be 14 months of hotels, rentals and RV trailers before the Southmayds entered their own home again.

During the rebuilding process, though, the Southmayds had also entered into a deal with a contractor acquaintance who the family would not name for this story, citing legal reasons.

After moving into their rebuilt home, they began noticing mounting problems with the house's construction, which the contractor would not rectify.

Bush first entered the scene last July after hearing about the case.

His initial assumption that the situation was simply an exaggerated disagreement quickly evaporated when he saw the extent of house's problems.

In addition to wires hanging out of the wall, a host of other issues were found such as the roof slumping, weak foundations, a leaking sewer pipe and a lack of nails on the house's siding, which cause the panels to slap the side of the house when the wind blows, triggering Jayson's PTSD.

"There's only one house I've seen that was worse," said Bush at the time. "It was when I was a building official in Lebanon and it was a heroin house."

Bush began sharing the story with others in the construction field, rallying several contractors around a project to make the home safe for the Southmayds.

After an extensive home inspection report, however, it became clear the house was beyond repair.

Bush said the house met several components of "dangerous building" code.

"It gives you 15 components. Any combination of those 15 components and I can declare this a dangerous building," he said. "I've probably got 14."

Tapping into his extensive rolodex, Bush was able to secure commitments from a number of professionals and the "stone soup" was beginning to heat up.

Today, construction is about 50 percent complete and nearly dried in, securing the building sufficiently to continue construction in wind and rain.

The project has raised about \$61,000 in funds alone, though the generous donations in labor and materials bring that number to around \$200,000, Bush said.

In the end, he estimates the project will have constructed a \$400,000 house.

"As far as the project, I'm tickled to death," said Bush. "It's going good. It's going smooth."

The new building is being designed with Jayson

in mind as well. Due to the nature of his injuries, the veteran expects to eventually be in a wheelchair and the restrictions due to COVID-19 have complicated his access to treatments.

Muscle atrophy due to a lack of physical therapy has weakened him and the therapy room in particular will be critical to Jayson's quality of life.

"I've gone downhill so far since COVID," said Jayson. "Everything that we had done, up into the point of COVID, got erased. And I'm actually down further now than I've been in years."

Though thankful for the generosity, Bush knows the project cannot count on free or heavily discounted materials to continue indefinitely. He said he is concerned about staying ahead of the project as material prices have skyrocketed.

"I want to keep our momentum going because I'm afraid that if I don't, things won't get done," he said.

He estimates as much as another \$80,000 will have to be secured to get the job done.

When a fundraiser for the project first launched on GoFundMe last year, it garnered a good deal of attention, however the momentum has not kept since moving the fundraiser to Operation Second Chance, a nonprofit charity which

aids wounded veterans.

Bush and the Southmayds suspect that since the online move, there may have been confusion about how to donate.

Though labor is not an issue, donations drying up has been a worry.

"I'm just concerned we won't have enough money to bridge the gap in materials and labor to get the final products," said Bush.

There is also urgency in getting the project done before winter. Perhaps most alarming is a failing roof in the Southmayds' current home, which they are not certain will survive another winter. The ceiling is being braced up from the inside.

On top of looming structural failure, the Southmayds' current house cannot maintain heating up to code, said Bush.

"And if they can't maintain the heat, they're all huddled around the stove. And the stove is under the roof that's going to fail," he added.

Jayson also relies heavily on heat to manage his pain, meaning winters can be particularly punishing.

"It's not just the house that's gonna collapse - it's me," he said.

Considering the unacceptability of living through another winter in their current house, Bush is hoping to have the family in their new home by October or

sooner.

Once the Southmayds are in their new home, Bush plans to forensically bring down the old building, using it as a cautionary tale for others in the field.

"We're going to try to create a humungous training opportunity for all the building departments in Oregon," he said.

For the Southmayds part, they remain grateful for the support over the past year and hope it will sustain until the project's completion.

"It was humbling," said Jayson of the past year of donations. "I mean, it restores a person's faith in humanity, especially after these last couple years. ... None of this would be happening without the kindness and the help from others."

"And we're not victims, we're warriors. But nobody fights wars alone. ... I just want to say thank you to everybody who has already donated and everybody who's even thinking [about it]. It means more than anybody could ever know."

To donate to the construction project, go online to southmaydhomebuild.org, click "Donate," and under "Designation," designate funds for the Southmayd Special Project.

The new GoFundMe account can be found under the title "Southmayd Home Build."

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