

givingback



Guns To Hammers founder and managing director JR Smith (right) with friend and fellow Marine Kevin Jackson

## BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

A nonprofit construction firm helps veterans through remodeling projects

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

**T**he familiar U.S. Marine Corps axiom “no man left behind” has taken on a whole new meaning with the launch of Guns To Hammers, a Houston-based nonprofit organization providing remodeling services to wounded veterans.

“There are more than 1.2 million wounded veterans in our country today that are having these types of challenges,” explained Guns To Hammers founder and managing director JR Smith. “I consider these people the latest generation of POWs as they truly are prisoners of war in their own homes, because of their new disabilities.

“Many of our veterans have been physically mutilated and mentally scarred by injuries, cut down in the prime of their lives,” Smith continued. “Many struggle with the

most basic, everyday activities like taking a shower, using the restroom, or preparing a meal in their kitchens. Some are unable to navigate through their homes using a wheelchair because their hallways are too narrow. I’ve noticed this need is rapidly increasing, and I wanted to give back to these heroes who have sacrificed so much for our freedoms. It’s our responsibility to make sure none of our vets are left behind. It’s up to us to ensure they are always welcomed home.”

Smith worked in the remodeling industry for more than 20 years as the founder and owner of Cypress, Texas-based H-Towne & Around Remodelers, Inc. “I noticed that there was a pattern of the types of sales calls that we were getting called out on,” he noted. “Many calls, especially in recent years, have been for wounded veterans

**Guns To Hammers' patriotic Jeep is used to raise awareness.**

to their homes—wheelchair ramps, special showers built that are compliant with ADA (Americans With Disabilities) standards, widening door openings, etc. Realizing that I could help these veterans, I decided to open Guns To Hammers, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit construction company that will raise money and reach out to wounded veterans that need this type of work done. By doing this, it will help with the recovery as well as help them live more independently, which is what all of them need and want. I will also, when possible, hire veterans to work for us. There is no better therapy than to put veterans in front of other veterans who have been there and done it, who are suffering and need help.”

Any disabled veteran is eligible to apply for Guns To Hammers remodeling services, which include:

- Building handicap-accessible bathrooms and kitchens.
- Enlarging door openings to accommodate wheelchairs.
- Building wheelchair ramps.
- Building residential-style elevators and/or lifts.
- Building “quiet rooms” in homes.
- Building additions to homes, including front and back porches designed to create a peaceful resting spot.

“Our ‘Register a Vet’ program on our website allows veterans, as well as families and friends of veterans, to register for assistance,” Smith pointed out. “After a short screening process, the Guns To Hammers staff will contact the veteran to qualify and schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss his or her needs.”



So far, the organization has completed projects primarily in the Houston and San Antonio areas, although Smith said he hopes to take the program nationwide. “Guns To Hammers is just getting started, but we have already completed several projects in our market,” he pointed out. “My privately owned remodeling company H-Towne & Around has also sponsored jobs as a charitable donation. It’s a slow process raising money—we are reaching out to corporate sponsors as these types of jobs cost several thousand dollars each. The average-size job ranges from \$5,000 to \$15,000.”

Recently, Smith and longtime friend and fellow Marine Kevin Jackson did a country-wide tour in a specially decorated, patriotic Jeep, spreading the word and raising awareness and funds to help change the lives of veterans in need. “Guns To Hammers believes healing begins with home and is dedicated to providing these services in a timely manner, ensuring our veterans feel at home in their own home, promoting independence,” Smith explained. “We are committed to giving back to these veterans who gave so much for our freedoms.”

*For more information, to register a disabled veteran, or to sponsor a veteran, visit [gunstohammers.com](http://gunstohammers.com).*