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## Injured Army Ranger Moves into New Perris Home



Retired Army Ranger Staff Sgt. Oskar Zepeda cuts the ribbon to his family's new home in the Avelina subdivision as representatives from Pulte Homes look on.

A retired Army Ranger badly injured in a suicide attack moved into a new home to Perris with his family earlier this month and City elected officials were on hand to greet the newcomers.

Staff Sgt. Oskar Zepeda, 31, his wife, Lisa, were overcome with emotion as they toured their 2,000-square-foot house which was provided free by Pulte Homes as part of its "Built to Honor" program. The house, valued at more than \$300,000, came completely furnished.

While Lisa Zepeda and her children, Sophia, 8, and Ryder, three months, looked over the interior, Oskar Zepeda spent a good bit of time outside, studying the built-in barbecue island. He plans on spending lots of time outdoors.

"This is one of the best days of my life," Zepeda said. "I feel truly blessed. I am happy to become part of the Perris community. It's more than I could ever imagine. It's like a dream. Thank you so much."

Lisa Zepeda, 33, said the family welcomes the chance to live in their own home. They have been living with relatives near Los Angeles in recent months. Daughter Sophia shed tears of joy when she discovered she would sleep in her own bedroom.

"We are so grateful to be here," she said.

Following a brief ceremony, Zepeda cut the ribbon to the family's new home on Citrus Avenue and took possession of the keys to the front door.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, Mayor Pro Tem Rita Rogers and Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley inside the Zepeda residence with Lisa Zepeda, 33, and daughter Sophia, 8.

### Built to Honor

Pulte's Build to Honor program puts deserving veterans in new homes across the country. Since launching the program in 2013, Pulte has provided mortgage-free homes to more than 40 veterans. The Zepeda home in the new Avelina subdivision is the third in California, the first in Southern California.

Chris Edgar, Pulte Homes Southern California division president, said Zepeda's home includes provisions to accommodate his limited mobility, the result of suffering a grenade blast that sent shrapnel throughout the right side of his body. The blast left him with severe leg damage that limits his ability to walk long distances and up inclines. The single-story house has extra wide doorways and an easy access shower.

Edgar said it is an honor to ease the burden on veterans like Zepeda.

"They are the most selfless and dedicated people," Edgar said. "They don't expect anything and we appreciate the opportunity to provide give back for the service they have given us. The Zepedas are going to be in Perris for a long time and they will be a great asset to the community."

Edgar said the City of Perris "has been a tremendous partner" for Pulte during the construction of the Avelina community.



Retired Army Ranger Staff Sgt. Oskar Zepeda is all smiles as he takes the keys to the family's new home in the Avelina subdivision. With him are his wife, Lisa and children, Sophia, 8, and Ryder, 3 months.

### Praise for service

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, Mayor Pro Tem Rita Rogers and City Councilman Mark Yarbrough, along with Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley attended the ribbon-cutting of the Zepeda home Friday, August 3. All praised Zepeda for his unwavering commitment and faithful service to the U.S.

"The sacrifices Sgt. Zepeda has made on behalf of our country makes this gift well deserved," Busch said. "It is marvelous what Pulte Homes has done for this family. We welcome them to the City of Perris."

Rogers said she was delighted to welcome the Zepeda family to Perris and thanked Pulte for its commitment to wounded veterans.

"There is no greater honor than to provide this home for a warrior injured on the battlefield," Rogers said. "It is built to suit his needs. It is wonderful to be able to honor our heroes."

Yarbrough noted that Perris' ties to the community date back to 1918, when March Field (later March Air Force Base and now March Air Reserve Base) brought military aviation to the region.

"We're a military community," Yarbrough said. "I really appreciate Pulte stepping up to make a difference."

Ashley said Pulte "used its treasure, out of the goodness of their own heart and stepped up to help in a profound way" to assist the Zepedas.

"Perris is blessed to have such partners in this City," Ashley said.



Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough welcomes Oskar Zepeda to Perris.

### Commitment to country

Zepeda, who grew up in San Fernando, joined the service in 2004 after high school graduation. He rose to the rank of staff sergeant and served nine tours of duty—three in Iraq and six in Afghanistan. He was part of a Ranger team assigned to track down and capture or kill enemy insurgents and commanders. He saw action in Baghdad, Mosul, Tikrit, Balad, Kabul, Bagram, Jalalabad and Loghar Province in Central Afghanistan.

On Sept. 8, 2011, Zepeda's team was clearing a compound in Logar when they located two Taliban insurgents. One gave up; the other tried to escape and Zepeda clamped a headlock on him. The man blew himself up.

Zepeda said he felt the right side of his body go numb and "the next thing I remember I was waking up in the hospital three days later." Since then, Zepeda has undergone more than 30 operations and more are scheduled. He lost muscles in his leg and has chronic pain in his right hand and arm.

Still, his only regret is not being able to continue serving the country he loves.

"If I could go back I would do it all over again," he said. "My commitment to my country is number one."

Zepeda was medically retired from the Army on March 20, 2014. Now he's ready to call Perris home.

"My family and I are happy to be here in Perris," he said.

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