

January 2012

TOWNTALK

NEWS FROM THE GOLD COAST

## LENDING A HAND &amp; A HAMMER

Even the imminent threat of Hurricane Irene couldn't keep volunteers away from Greenwich Police Sgt. Roger Petrone's North Stamford home late last summer. Total strangers, joined by some of Petrone's fellow officers, demolished walls, hoisted chunks of concrete and spruced the place up with fresh paint.

Petrone, a seventeen-year GPD veteran, has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's Disease. Since his diagnosis five years ago, he's been the inspiration for several fundraising events in town. But this project was more personal: Petrone's home was renovated to make it more accessible.

When Petrone finally got to see the results of the volunteers' labors—including his new wheelchair accessible bathroom—he insisted he didn't deserve it. But no one who pitched in to make his life a little easier would agree.

"When we started telling people what we wanted to do they inevitably said, 'Count me in,'" says Greenwich Police Lt. Richard Cochran, who helped coordinate the project along with the nonprofit Greenwich Military Covenant of Care,

which supports members of the armed forces, veterans and their families.

Petrone, who patrolled New York harbor in a Greenwich police boat in the hours after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, also received \$15,000 worth of free painting as the first recipient of A.G. Williams Painting Company's "Home in Need" grant. "We wanted to honor someone in the community who was a 9/11 first-responder," explains Doug Kitchen, Connecticut sales representative for A.G. Williams. "And the more we learned about Sgt. Petrone, the more we wanted to help."

When Petrone saw the results of the volunteer's hard work he was "surprised and a little guilty." "I know there are people far more deserving," he says. Yet he is indebted to the volunteers who made it possible for him to maneuver his wheelchair into an open, flat-surfaced shower. "I know from my career in public safety just how dangerous confined spaces can be to the elderly and physically disabled," he says.

The officer was especially thrilled that his nine-year-old daughter, Sydney, was included. Her bedroom was updated with bright paint and new bedding courtesy of Covenant of Care volunteers, according to Mary Jane Huffman, vice chairman of its board. They also treated her to a surprise ninth birthday party. "Regardless of the difficulties I am faced with, seeing my daughter happy will always bring me happiness," says Petrone. "I am forever grateful to everyone involved."

—Beth Cooney Fitzpatrick



Sgt. Roger Petrone with fellow members of the Greenwich Police Department, Detective Pat Iorfino, Lt. Richard Cochran and Detective Martin O'Reilly