The Daily News
Low: 30; High: 43
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
SUNDAY
ONE OF AMERICA'S GREAT NEWSPAPERS
LIVING Preserve and enjoy old family recordings E1
STEELERS Cleveland poses threat to playoff chances C3
PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
www.pittsburghlive.com
To subscribe: 800-909-TRIB
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2005
Pittsburgh Edition
Six sections • 62 pages
50¢
SUBMITTED
Kevin Martin, currently in Iraq has served in the military for 18 years.
Soldier win's home of his own
A foundation responds to the tale of a sergeant who has endured many losses.
BY CRAIG SMITH
TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Kevin Martin's trip home from Iraq in January will be one of the few he has made during his military career that doesn't deal with a loss.
Instead, Martin, 40, who volunteered in May for active duty as a means to support his five children, will come home to a house of his own in McKeesport — his first, and one that is mortgage-free.
During the 18 years Martin has served in the military, four family members have died: his 3-year-old daughter, Royelsha; his uncle, James Smith; his father, Henry Martin; and his mother, Dorothy Martin.
In October, three of his close friends were killed on a mission in Iraq.
"After every deployment, when returning home, he was
SEE HOME • A9
Home for the Holidays
for a
Iraq or Afghanistan War Vet
Enter to win this house-FREE!
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2005
Holiday blessing
Jim Toner of The Hope Lives Foundation shares in the excitement of Rosalind Martin, who submitted the winning entry for a home giveaway on behalf of her brother, McKeesport native Sgt. Kevin Martin, currently serving in Iraq.
Local soldier wins home giveaway
By BONNIJEAN COONEY ADAMS
Daily News Editor
Homecomings have been bittersweet for 40-year-old McKeesport native Kevin Martin.
Following graduation from McKeesport Area High School, he enlisted in the Army. Almost every time he returned from a deployment, he was faced with a major loss of a loved one — his father, a 3-year-old daughter, an uncle, and finally his mother.
When he comes back to the area on leave from his current assignment in Iraq, Sgt. Martin returns to something those who love him hope will give him a new start in life — a home of his own.
Wednesday, the keys to a renovated four-bedroom home along Boyd Street were handed over on his behalf to Rosalind Martin, the sergeant's sister, who nominated him to receive the house through The Hope Lives Foundation's "Home for the Holidays" giveaway.
"Oh my God, I can't believe it," an exuberant Rosalind Martin exclaimed after cutting the ribbon and welcoming friends, relatives and dignitaries into the home.
She turned and hugged North Huntingdon Twp. businessman Jim Toner, the founda-
See HOME GIVEAWAY, Page 4
Are you or someone you know struggling as a result of U.S. military service in Iraq or Afghanistan?
Please tell us how you have experienced financial, emotional, or physical hardship due to your service. Get all the details and entry blank on our website, or call today.
The Hope Lives Foundation
thehopelivesfoundation.org
412-673-9800
The Hope Lives Foundation is a charitable division of locally owned Real Estate Riches.
PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
FROM PAGE ON
Tuesday, December 20, 2005
Soldier wins home in McKeesport
Jim Toner, executive director of the Hope Lives Foundation, stands in front of a McKeesport home the foundation is renovating to give to serviceman Sgt. Kevin Martin. Martin, who is serving in Iraq, won the home through a contest his sister entered on his behalf.
Nonprofit giving away McKeesport house to military family
A veteran's WELCOME HOME
Martha Rial/Post-Gazette
Renovation work continues on this house on Boyd Street in McKeesport, which will be given free to a military family. At right is an architect's rendering of what the house will look like once the renovations are completed.
K-6
PITTSBURGH POST GAZETTE ■ SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2005 ■ WWW.POST-GAZ
Nonprofit giving away McKeesport house
VETERAN, FROM PAGE K-1
The West Homestead native says he's not looking for families with a "gimme gimme" attitude: "I want someone who will take the house and run with it," he says. "This is a hand up, not a hand-out."
In fact, he says, the winner doesn't even have to agree to live in the house but could instead rent it or even sell it. "The idea is to give someone a financial start."
He also hopes the contest will showcase the community of McKeesport, which flush with inexpensive houses just waiting to be fixed up, as well as to show people the right way to rehab a house.
This isn't the first time Mr. Toner reached out to those in need. Since the Hope Lives Foundation in the investor has helped hundreds of fallen through the cracks by providing everything from Thanksgiving turkeys and children's Christmas gifts to paying security deposits and utility bills. But this is the first time the charitable organization has undertaken such a large and potentially life-changing project.
While the contest was certainly inspired by ABC's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," the true genesis for the idea sprang from a conversation Mr. Toner had with his good friend, Danny Pasquarelli, co-owner of Luciano's Italian Brick Oven in White Oak.
Mr. Pasquarelli's son Michael, 22, enlisted in the Marine Forces Reserve after 9/11, and ended up doing two tours of duty on the front lines in Iraq. While he was lucky to return to the comfortable lifestyle he enjoyed before serving, many of his fellow soldiers weren't so fortunate: "He told me that a lot of these guys come back in pretty bad shape, with no money and no options," Mr. Toner says.
Meanwhile, he was trying to figure out what to do with the Boyd Street property, which he purchased in 1988 for $6,300 and then fixed up as a rental unit.
"I thought, 'We teach people to do that for a living, so why not do it for a vet?'"
In August, Mr. Toner paid off the mortgage on the Boyd Street property, made plans to gut it, and started enlisting friends and business associates to donate materials, labor or both. Among the first to sign on was master plumber Bruce Raible of B & J Plumbing and Home Remodeling.
"It was a great way to show how much we appreciate what these boys are doing for us, sacrificing their lives," he says.
Mr. Toner originally limited the contest to families living in southwestern Pennsylvania but had trouble getting applicants. So he recently decided to open it to military families living anywhere in the state. Entries will be judged by Capt. Chris Stephens, who oversees the Salvation Army in McKeesport, and Bob Lee, who sits on the Hope Lives board. The winners will be announced in mid-December.
While the exterior of the house is well on its way, the interior still needs lots of work. To fill it, Mr. Toner is looking for everything from beds and tables to major appliances. Individuals are as important as companies, he says. Mr. Pasquarelli, for instance, is a restaurateur but is donating the vinyl siding.
"You don't have to be a big company to do this," says Mr. Toner. "When so many people come together, you can really make a difference."
For more information on the "Home for the Holidays" house giveaway, call 412-673-9800 or visit www.thehopelivesfoundation.org. Entries must be submitted by Nov. 10 to The Hope Lives Foundation, Home for an Iraq Vet, 112 Arona Road, North Huntingdon, PA 15642.
Gretchen McKay can be reached at gmckay@post-gazette.com or 412-762-8620.
Martha Rial/Post-Gazette
Jim Toner stands on the front porch of the McKeesport house during renovation.