Operation Honor was founded as a way to provide U.S.-made remembrance items for veteran cemeteries while providing veterans with programs designed to heal.

Building a future for veterans

Joe Montgomery launched his nonprofit, Operation Honor, out of his home, focusing on woodworking projects for veterans. He began building cornhole boards in his garage, raising funds for troops through tournaments called “Tailgating for Troops,” and sending boards to military members overseas.

“Our mission is to enhance the lives of the veterans and their family,” said Montgomery. “When these men and women started coming into our shop, we found they would simply turn things off. The drama, the stress, the anxiety, the noise, the depression would all just shut off. They were making things with their hands. They were making what we call ‘products with a purpose.’”

In 2015, while Montgomery was visiting Kentucky Veterans Cemetery North, he noticed that many of the flag burial cases that the cemetery used were made outside the United States.
Montgomery and the veterans of Operation Honor began building flag burial boxes and other pieces of remembrance for veterans and their loved ones.

As the organization has grown—and more veterans have gotten involved—so has the need for a larger workshop. In May, the DAV Charitable Service Trust awarded $148,000 to Operation Honor to help fund the building of the organization’s new home, Patriots Landing.

“When I heard the news, I was in Lowe’s. I think my knees were shaking,” said Montgomery. “It’s just an incredible blessing from DAV. Thanks to DAV, we are now able to move forward with our plans of finishing Patriots Landing.”

Construction on Patriots Landing is slated to begin in spring 2022 in Grant County directly behind Kentucky Veterans Cemetery North. The facility will be open for all to come and see the veteran-crafted product showroom, tour the facility and view military displays throughout. It will be a home for veterans and their families to participate in multiple programs designed to heal.

One of those veterans is Jennifer Wells, who enlisted in the Army and served until she was medically retired in 2014. While deployed to Iraq, Wells served as perimeter security for her base. She would spend hours at night in the watchtower looking over her fellow service members. About 10 months into her deployment, Wells was standing guard with another soldier, who left the floor hatch of their watchtower open. Unaware, Wells stepped through and fell more than 40 feet to the ground below.

“It wasn’t really his fault or my fault. It was just an accident,” said Wells.

Upon impact, Wells broke two vertebrae and her arm and sustained severe head injuries. She was medevaced out of Iraq and returned home, where her surgeon told her she was lucky to
have survived.

Years later, she came to Operation Honor.

“Woodworking was something I’d always been interested in but never had the time to do,” said Wells. “I finally decided this year to go down and try it. It was great. It was a way for me to relax and fully let go of everything in my head. I was able to focus just on one thing and let the worry and anxiety of life melt away.”

By the end of Wells’ first day with Operation Honor, she had created a wooden American flag with 9 mm bullet casings that represented the 50 stars.

“It was the perfect place for me,” said Wells. “I was able to zone out and focus on what I was creating. Building something like that with your hands gives you a sense of pride. You don’t realize that, though, until you’re done and you see the finished product. By the end of it, I felt like this weight had been lifted, like all of the stress and anxiety had poured out onto my work.”

Changed through her experience with Operation Honor, Wells wrote a letter to the family that would receive the flag she made that day.

“I wanted them to know this flag wasn’t just manufactured or quickly thrown together,” said Wells, “that there was a lot of meaning and love that went into this piece. I wanted them to know it also helped me and my journey and that their support means a lot to this organization. This organization is really helping veterans.”

Supporting veterans like Wells through her work with Operation Honor, the DAV Charitable Service Trust is helping to address the most pressing issues and concerns of disabled veterans and their families.
“Organizations like Operation Honor allow veterans to deal with the struggles of transition by focusing their energies on new skills and creating these products with a purpose,” said Richard E. Marbes, president of the Charitable Service Trust. “The Charitable Service Trust is proud to help make a difference where it matters most.”

To learn more about Operation Honor and Patriots Landing, visit patriotslanding.org. To learn more about the DAV Charitable Service Trust, visit cst.dav.org.