Military Wife Gets a Hand with Home Repairs

By Casey Toner, SouthtownStar

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CHICAGO — Like many wives of deployed military personnel, Park Forest resident Rianne Toll is burdened by a heavy heart and a fuller plate.

Her husband, Jeffrey Toll Jr., is in the Navy Reserve and has worked in an armory in Kuwait for the past eight months.

His absence leaves the stay-at-home mom in charge of their three children - ages 14, 12, and 9 - all whom live at home with her in their middle-class, ranch-style house in the 100 block of Shabbona Drive.

"Everything has gone wrong in this house since he left," Toll said, handing her youngest daughter a Hot Pocket fresh out of the microwave.

"My (water) pipes busted in the back room. My furnace went out. My truck broke down, and the hamster got lost. You name it, it has happened here."

Then, the roof of her house started to leak during one of the coldest winter months. Luckily for her family, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Operation Homefront organizations donated $3,500 to buy Toll and her family a new roof, a back door and a front screen door.

Although they can't fly her husband home, they hired contractors to fix the roof and install the new doors on behalf of the couple.

"She is a spouse of an active-duty member," Veterans of Foreign Wars 16th District Cmdr. Robert Mcleod said. "She's nowhere close to getting the assistance she needs while he's overseas serving his country."

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Toll said she first noticed the roof leak in February. Stemming from the snow and ice on the roof, water began dripping into the corner of her son's bedroom, pulling the paint out.

"When it rains, I also get three wet spots in the kitchen ceiling," Toll said, adding that she called Mcleod immediately after recognizing the water damage. "When it gets hot out, they dry up and go away."
Mcleod said the VFW scrounged up $2,500, and Operation Homefront contributed $1,000 to pay for the repairs.

"We don't do enough for our military families," Operation Homefront case manager Glenda Cain said. "These guys are what keeps this land free. It's important to support them."

Although Toll said she is receiving money from her husband through the government, she noted that he earned more money in his job as a Harvey police sergeant.

"He doesn't make as much as he does at his civilian job, so it's hard to make ends meet and make home repairs," Toll said. "It is hard. It's very hard. You're like a single parent. You have to do everything yourself."

Throughout the process of her husband's deployment, Toll said she stays in touch with him by phone and tells him everything, including news of the free repairs.

"He's so excited and thankful," Toll said. "I'll just say I'm blessed to have these organizations that help military families. There's nothing else out there to help us."