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Hillside group to build home for vet

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November 12, 2009

By DAVID POLLARD dpollard@pioneerlocal.com

Sergio Lopez lost both his legs below the knee in January 2006 while serving in Iraq as an Army specialist. He was driving a military vehicle, part of a convoy, when a roadside bomb went off.

On Saturday the Army veteran was recognized for his service and sacrifice not only in word, but in deed.

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Supporters and veterans gather around Sergio Lopez, his wife, Maria, and their two children, Sasha, 6, and Sofia, 3, during the ground-breaking ceremony for their new home to be built in Hillside. (Jerry Daliege/For STM)

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Veteran Sergio Lopez and his wife, Maria, applaud speakers on Nov. 7 during the ground-breaking ceremony for their new home to be built in Hillside. (Jerry Daliege/For STM)

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A groundbreaking ceremony took place in Hillside Nov. 7 for the new home to be built -- from the ground up, free of charge -- for Lopez and his family.

"I found out through a group that helps out wounded veterans," said Lopez, 27, who currently lives in Joliet with his wife and two young daughters. "I was a little apprehensive to see what I was going to be involved in, but once we sat down with the people in Hillside ... we were real excited and really happy."

Lopez will also have the opportunity to sit down with the architect to see and make suggestions about how the house will be designed to accommodate his special needs.

He does have one major concern.

"I'd like to have a two-car attached garage (to the house)," he said. "That would be real nice just because of my personal situation, because of my prosthetics. When winter comes it's a whole different game for me."

The land the Lopez family will be living on is about 6,500 square feet and was left over from the construction of Hillside Town Center. The developer, Plote Companies of Elgin, donated the land near Oak Avenue and Harrison Street, to the village.

John Flood, economic development director for Hillside, consulted with the mayor about how to use the land.

According to Flood, the mayor replied, "Why don't we help a



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Sofia Lopez, 3, daughter of veteran Sergio Lopez, stacks up rocks at the site of their new home in Hillside. (Jerry Daliege/For STM)

Flood established Hillside Disabled Veterans Home Project (HDVHP), a nonprofit organization to raise money for the construction of a handicapped accessible two-story home.

Along with monetary donations, Flood is seeking building material, home furnishings and trades people willing to volunteer their time to help build the home.

The goal is to have the home completed by Memorial Day, but Flood believes it may take a little longer than that.

Lopez has to live in the house at least two years. If he leaves before or after the allotted time he will not receive the deed to the property and the committee will look for another disabled veteran to occupy

it.

Adam Neisendorf, development coordinator for Plote Companies, said they are excited about the project.

"We're just glad to be involved in this project and giving back to the Hillside community," he said. "It's a way to show our appreciation and do something positive in the community."

Donations are tax deductible. Checks or money orders can be made out to "HDVHP" and sent to the attention of: John Flood, Hillside Village Hall, 425 Hillside Ave., Hillside, Ill. 60162. Call Flood at (708) 202-4324.

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