

Community pools resources to honor Tuller for service

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It took Bill Hanson almost eight years to accomplish something he had on his heart for a soldier he had only read about until 2012.

In 2004, Northwest Florida had an outpouring of support for U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Dustin Tuller, who was seriously wounded in Iraq.

Two days before Christmas Eve 2003, Tuller received multiple gunshots to his legs and pelvis, which led to the eventual amputation of both his legs.

Many residents jumped in to help build a home for Tuller and his children, but Hanson wanted to do more.

Recently, he (and many others) had that chance as Tuller and his wife, Cheryl, were shopping for a swimming pool.

"I spoke to my chaplain (Jeffery Jencks) about this after learning about Dustin and his situation, but I didn't want to go directly to the family," Hanson said. "Then we got a call from Cheryl Tuller about estimates for a pool and I asked my secretary to hold them off a couple of days so I could check on a few things."

Hanson, who owns Gulf Coast Pool and Spa in Pensacola, called his suppliers. They jumped on board and not only installed the pool, but lined up others to help landscape and finish the paradise for the Tullers. Hanson even talked to a business he works with (Compass Solar) to install a solar system, which keeps the pool at a constant 85 degrees.

"We were talking about a pool, but we weren't really sold on the idea," Dustin recalled. "To make it happen, we would have to get a home equity loan and we weren't too keen on the idea of doing that from the start."

Hanson then went out to the Tuller home and, while looking at how he would get his equipment up to the property, he told Cheryl Tuller the news.

"I asked her how I would get my equipment up to the house and she showed me the service road," Hanson said. "That is when I told her they would have a pool and it would not cost them a dime.

"I told her I was here to make sure Dustin got what he wanted and needed."

Cheryl was overcome with emotion and then they both went to share the news with Dustin.

"We had been talking about the pool and the size and everything," Cheryl recalled. "Dustin even had me get a tape measure so Bill could measure him to make sure he could stand in the shallow end and the water be about chest high."

Dustin, who says he is appreciative of the support he has received since coming home from Iraq notes he was overwhelmed with the news of a pool.

"When I first learned about what was happening, the first thing I did was ask myself if I have accomplished enough to receive this," Tuller said. "If I am not giving back, then I don't deserve something like this."

For five years, Tuller was on the road every other week. He was visiting military hospitals, working with disabled young adults and even participated in 20 marathons.

"I remember when something came on the news about a person in a situation like this I would turn the channel," Tuller confessed. "Then one day it was me on television and being asked questions.

"I am wanting to live as normal a life as I can and that is all you can ask for."

"I have ran marathons, gone down ski slopes hundreds of times, and more," Tuller said. "I can teach you now how to ski, play tennis, basketball, and help you get a feeling of accomplishment.

"That is the biggest reward for me."

When the pool was completed Cheryl and Dustin surprised the kids with it.

"We kept this secret from them," Dustin and Cheryl said. "We watched every thing happen and helped do things."

Now you will find Dustin enjoying the large shallow end, where he plans to spend most of his time.

"This was kind of hands-on for me as I helped the work crews make sure things were wide enough for me and my chair," Dustin said. "This is just an amazing thing to have happen when you think of what all the businesses are going though these days.

"I am just overwhelmed."

Individuals and companies who donated to make the Tuller Pool come alive include

Santa Rosa County Commissioner Don Salter

Gulf Coast Pool and Spa in Pensacola.

Compass Solar

A Perfect Mix, LLC

All safe Pool Security, Inc.

Mike Miller Pentair Water

Latham Pool Products

Liberty Electric

Mathes Electic

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Water Works

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