

the NEWS

THE HVACR CONTRACTOR'S WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE SINCE 1926

MAY 5, 2008

VISIT US ONLINE AT WWW.ACHRNEWS.COMA **bnp** PUBLICATION
media

When Mom Returns From War

After 22 years in the United States Air Force, Staff Sergeant Sue Preiss learned that she would soon leave her home and family near Honolulu, Hawaii to spend six months in Iraq. She was scheduled to leave in December 2005 and return in May 2006.

News coverage of the war, focusing on the risks of duty half-way across the world, stirred her husband's resolute commitment. "When she returns from her tour of duty in Iraq, not if," he recalled, "I knew that we'd have to make a lasting statement. Our daughter Courtney and I would support her throughout the entire tour, and especially when Sue returned."

Sue's departure was, of course, a sad and anxious occasion. Tears rolled and promises were made. Sue vowed that this would be her last tour of duty, the longest yet away from her family. Just before she boarded the jet that would take her away, she spoke the words Preston and Courtney had hoped to hear for years. "I'll retire when this one's done."

BOMBS AWAY

It wasn't long before the reality of overseas duty sank in — over there and at home. Six months was a long separation, but each passing day brought them 24 hours closer to each other and the comforts of home. For Sue, the worst part was the inability to be with her family. But close behind that sadness was the fear of attack. Enemy rockets slammed into her facility occasionally, and the sound of distant gunfire was a constant reminder of the very real threat of serving there.

Preston, owner of a custom welding operation based in Honolulu, was now tasked with the responsibilities of maintaining the household while also serving as his teenage daughter's mentor and guide. "It was a very stressful period for all of us," said Preston. "Courtney and I could only imagine how things were for Sue."

For her part, Sue characteristically made light of the situation there. One day a missile landed within the compound and shattered a bank of portable toilets. Plastic parts and, well, other debris flew in all directions. A senior officer was caught, quite literally, with his pants down, a bit dirtier than when he entered the latrine; shaken but unhurt. "It was a scene right out of 'MASH.'"



Billy Souza, installation supervisor, at AMV Air Conditioning, Inc., sets the outside unit of the Fujitsu ductless system.

exclaimed Sue. "We must've told that story a hundred times and with as many variations."

The worst part of Sue's experience in Iraq was the endlessness of it and the fatigue. She struggled with the long hours of work, dismal working conditions, and the stress of being in such close confines with a small group of people. "We all hated being there, but yet at the same time we knew our service was helping to save lives," she said. "Most who serve there stay longer than I did, and many had much harder, more dangerous duty. I was blessed to get out of there after just six months, alive and in one piece."

SHOCK AND AWE MAKEOVER

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Preston and Courtney, 18, helped move Sue through each passing day with stories from home and digital photos, e-mailed to Sue. But they also conspired to make Sue's return

home the best it could be.

"We wanted to dazzle her," said Preston. "That meant Courtney and I would need to join forces with some furniture stores, a flooring company, a paint supplier, and plenty of folks in the HVAC and plumbing and mechanical industry. We also vowed not to say a word. We didn't have a lot of bucks to work with, so we'd have to do a lot of the labor ourselves."

Preston admitted that the home was ready for some updates. The 1,400-square-foot, three-bedroom house, built in 1994, hadn't seen much change since its construction. "Overall, we like the home a lot, the neighborhood, and its location. But I knew that if we were ever to make the improvements we wanted, this was the moment to make 'em happen."

To entertain themselves, and to add credence to their claim that all was quiet on the home front, Preston and Courtney took

photos of each other in the house with dirty clothes strewn about, pots and pans left untouched in the kitchen, and pets pawing around on unmade beds.

"We wanted to deliver 'shock n' awe' surprise when she came home," exclaimed Preston. "Fireworks, tremors, complete amazement. That's what we were after. So that meant we had to punch holes in any expectations about what she was returning to!"

Unknown to Sue, Preston and Courtney toiled away. They replaced carpeting and some of the curtains, painted most of the rooms and hallway, replaced plumbing fixtures, bought new furniture and a flat screen TV, painted the exterior, and planted a bunch of shrubs outside.

"We couldn't do everything we wanted to do, even with six months to make it happen," said Courtney. "So dad and I decided that only two things would

remain, and we'd get them done after her return."

WELCOME HOME

Six long, difficult months later, Sue boarded the flight that brought her home. Tears fell again at the airport, but this time they were crying for joy; it was over. As they drove into the neighborhood, Courtney applied a blindfold around her mother's eyes. When she first saw the house, Sue was surprised at every turn.

"I never imagined a homecoming like this," she said. "The joy at being home, with family, and at seeing my house with its extreme makeover was overwhelming. It was so good to be home."

According to Preston, she slept for days. Gradually, she emerged and was eventually greeted with even better news when Preston and Courtney told her that there were two facets to the makeover that they couldn't accomplish while



TOP: Preston, Courtney, and Sue Preiss strike a pose beneath a Fujitsu ductless system indoor unit. Sue was surprised with a home makeover upon her return from serving the military in Iraq. **ABOVE:** Bryson Freitas, journeyman and foreman for Commercial Plumbing, performs a little fine-tuning on the Bradford White tankless water heater installed in the Preiss home.

she was in Iraq. Preston had made plans to improve the home's HVAC system, and also to replace an old, inefficient, electric tank-type water heater that provided heat "when it wanted to," said Preston. "They're next on the list," he told her.

On a perfect Hawaiian day last fall, the Preiss' watched as two installations unfolded before their eyes. A three-person crew from AMV Air Inc., based in Honolulu, installed a super-efficient Fujitsu Halcyon ductless multizone, with air conditioner evaporators, in Sue's upstairs home office and,

next to it, Courtney's room, two spaces that got uncomfortably warm nine months of the year.

And, down a quick flight of stairs, Honolulu-based Commercial Plumbing had dispatched Bryson Freitas, journeyman and jobsite foreman, and Ryan Kurashige, technician, to make neat work of the water heater replacement. Mark Suzuki, VP, and Randy Hiraki, president of the firm, hearing of Sue's home-from-war status, and the work being done at her home, stopped in to check on the job as it neared

completion and to wish her well.

Freitas had not previously installed a natural gas-fired Bradford White EverHot water heater, but he was impressed with the technology. "The tankless water heater could have been mounted inside or out. The Preiss' chose an interior location in the laundry area."

Mike Williams, who owns TM Construction, and Daniel Hernandez, an electrician, arrived on the scene just before Freitas and Kurashige. They completed electrical connections for the new unit in short order, leaving a

"Welcome Home, Sue," note hanging on a wire.

Five hours later, Freitas and Kurashige had removed the old water heater and installed the new, wall-mounted, 50-pound, 15,000- to 180,000-Btu system. There's no standing pilot, very little sound, full diagnostic controls, and it runs only when they need hot water.

By mid-afternoon, Sue was doing her first load of clothes with the new hot water. The Preiss' have now had the new system for several months and, said Sue, "We still can't get over what a luxury it

is not to run out of hot water. We'd gotten so used to timing our showers, 30 minutes apart. Now we shower, wash clothes and dishes whenever we need to, and we've also seen a big drop in the cost of heating the water."

Independent sales representative Lyle Nakamura with Honolulu-based LN Sales, also came to see the Bradford White installation, being that it was the first of its kind (now one of many) on the island.

THAT'S COOL

The ductless Fujitsu system was installed by AMV's Billy Souza, installation supervisor; John Palpalatoc, apprentice; and Henry Flores, service technician. "We had a few challenges getting the refrigerant lines through the eaves upstairs, but overall the installation was relatively simple," said Souza.

Fujitsu's new Halcyon multi-zone equipment has efficiency ratings of up to 16.5 SEER and 9 HSPF and super-quiet operation. Though many different configurations are available, the Preiss' chose a 24,000-Btu system with two air handlers.

Standard features include a wireless remote control for the wall-mount units and a wired remote control for concealed ceiling units, a plasma IAQ filter for wall-mount units, sleep timer, four-event programmable timer, dry mode, auto louver, auto restart-reset mode and efficient operation with low, or high ambient temperatures.

"We install a lot of the Fujitsu systems here in Hawaii," said Aldrin Vallahermosa, president of AMV Air. "The manufacturer recently added many new lines and configurations, even permitting integration with ducted networks. But for an installation like the Preiss', a conventional ductless setup, with two evaporator units, was a perfect fit."

"At last, it's comfortable and cool upstairs, even in the warmest weather," said Courtney. "When these two jobs were finished that day, it felt so good knowing that we'd done it for Mom."

But the ultimate reward for their work was the decision Sue made after 22 years of service in the Air Force. She came home from the air base one day and corralled her husband and daughter in the kitchen. "I made a decision this morning and submitted all the paperwork. The commander signed off on it, so it's final: my retirement from military service will be official soon."

Sue is now a civilian working for the military in Hawaii. Preston's welding enterprise thrives. Courtney is the editor-in-chief of her high school's newspaper and will enter college soon. And together they now enjoy all the comforts of home. ■

Reprinted from

Air Conditioning | Heating | Refrigeration

the **NEWS**

Copyright 2008