



Integrator Keeps Spirit of 'Forrest Gump's Lt. Dan Going Strong

Foundation started by Academy Award nominee Gary Sinise works with IT and Media Solutions to specially customize homes and give back to those in need.



Martin Helbig, Jay Juarez, Gary Sinise, Levi Oldham, and Joel Berrettini of IT and Media Solutions.

Chuck Schneider · June 26, 2014

Berrettini, was an IT Director for an Automotive Dealer Group from a decade ago, didn't know it then, but that experience laid the foundation to start a four-year-old custom installation business. Watching a segment on Fox News on the 11th anniversary of 9/11 in 2012 changed his life forever. It was a feature on the [Gary Sinise Foundation](#) presenting the keys of a specially customized automated home to a physically challenged veteran in California. It was Sinise's own epiphany — solidified after his award-winning role as Lt. Dan Taylor in Forrest Gump— that brought about the foundation to make the home possible in the first place.

Berrettini was struck. He wanted to help. Since 9/11 he had thought about joining the military but it

wasn't to be. His father had served in the Air Force. Berrettini also had experience with special needs as his older brother had an early onset stroke at just six years old, (he was four) leaving the sibling in need of extra care.

"I just wanted to give back and I knew helping with these houses was going to be my way of serving," he says.

He talked it over with his wife, Deb, who backed him all the way. So, when he made a cold call to the Gary Sinise Foundation, Berrettini figured he would volunteer his services for an occasional home in his neck of the woods. But his involvement turned out to be more ... much, much more. He was in the right place at the right time for a guy who "just wanted to give something back." As luck would have it the Sinise Foundation was going through some fits and starts with the group responsible for the home Joel had originally seen on Fox News.

90 DAYS IN TEXAS HOTEL

Suddenly Berrettini found himself in Texas, in charge of procuring all of the CE gear and supervising the design and installation for one of the Sinise Foundation's homes. He reached out to Core Brands for help and the company came through big time, donating everything Berrettini asked them for. In fact a number of IT and Media Solutions' regular vendors also stepped up to the plate.

Still, he needed help to put all of the donated equipment into the wounded veteran's home — doing it alone in 100- degree plus Texas summer heat and humidity was a daunting task. He made a cold call to local security and home integration company Builder Security Group (BSG), a major player in San Antonio and Austin, to explain his situation and ask for help. BSG had the local license he needed to work and the company generously offered a crew.

Through the local D+M rep, Berrettini met the head of CI at Bjorn's A/V, a [CE Pro 100](#) integrator in San Antonio, which also volunteered a crew. Together they prewired the special home in 10 days with only minimal interference from the general contractor.

"We were sweating like Paris Hilton at a spelling bee," Berrettini jokingly remembers in reference to the heat.

He then went back home and waited. He and the crews from Bjorn's and BSG asked the builder for a three-week window to do the install. The call came around October 1. The builder would be ready for them in about one month. The veteran's family was hoping to get into the house in time for Thanksgiving.

Berrettini arrived on November 1 only to find the house had no power. He and the Texas crew were told it would be on any day. The deadline day of Thanksgiving came and went and still the house was dark. It remained dark until December 10 and Berrettini remained in San Antonio until January 25.

Nearly 90 days in a hotel far from home over the holiday season (not to mention his birthday) might have caused another man to rethink volunteering. Not Berrettini.

“I felt it was going to be a mess when I arrived in the summer,” he recalls. “But I made a promise to Gary, his Foundation and the serviceman who was going to live there. I couldn’t fly back to Milwaukee and wait for the builder to give me the go ahead. That’s not how I do things.”

How does he do things? Very well, indeed. The 4,300-square-foot home’s eventual integration was created for a veteran who has round-the-clock health care professionals tending to his every need. For example, under the Elan control system there are three temperature zones, one for each of the two floors and a third for the vet’s room where it needs to be cooler because of his extensive burns.

There are separate key codes for the family and the caregivers, and a camera at the doorbell area as well all over both the inside and outside of the home. The game room on the second floor has a 47-inch LCD and 106-inch projection screen. All of the projector and shade functions are controlled via an iPad. There are televisions in five of the home’s rooms. The veteran, his wife and 8-year-old daughter are thrilled, Berrettini reports.

5 MORE HOMES ON TAP

For Berrettini, that first Texas home for a wounded warrior was just the start. He now has five more veterans’ projects on his plate that should be fully built and occupied by the end of this year and all of next year. And he proudly hands out a business card that identifies him as a proud supporter of the Gary Sinise Foundation.

He sticks with the design from the first home wherever possible. Then, with the help of local reps and distributors, he finds CI firms to volunteer a crew to help him put it all together. It’s worth noting that one of the four new jobs is back in Texas and both BSG and Bjorn’s will be back.

“I love both these fine companies,” he exclaims. “I owe them a lot.”

It’s also worth noting that Core Brands is now listed on the Sinise Foundation website as a corporate partner. Berrettini is still designing and installing systems at home in Wisconsin — just fewer than before since this whirlwind burst of projects took over his schedule.

“I was pretty selective before all this happened. I’m even more selective now,” he says.

But he does so with fewer “for profit” homes preferring to spend the bulk of his time on projects for those who sacrificed for their country. So when the Sinise Foundation gets to your neighborhood and Berrettini reaches out, perhaps you’ll help.