

# Helping Veterans: Local Flooring Company Receives World Trade Center Fragment As Thanks For Aid



## SUZETTE WENGER

Tina Essis Lountzis of Essis & Sons Carpet One, 1320 Manheim Pike, holds a fragment of the World Trade Center as thanks for the company's work with Building For America's Bravest, a program to provide housing for veterans with disabilities.

## By Tom Knapp

It's a thick slab of worn steel, possibly cut from a girder. Its size and weight would make a good paperweight, but there's little else it could be used for.

But the steel block is more than it appears. It's a potent symbol of a recent national tragedy — and a reminder why the armed forces remain necessary.

It's a piece of the World Trade Center, destroyed in New York City on Sept. 11, 2001, in a vicious terrorist attack.

The piece, mounted in a framed shadow box, is on display at Essis & Sons Carpet One, 1320 Manheim Pike.

"It's a beautiful thing," store manager Tina Essis Lountzis said Wednesday. "And it's a great cause."

It was presented June 3 — by retired FDNY firefighter Jimmy Kielty — as thanks for the company's efforts in helping disabled veterans get on with their lives with new homes that meet their special needs.

"We got involved three, four years ago," Michael Essis, vice president of the flooring company, said Wednesday.

“They started building these homes for veterans ... and our supplier, Mohawk Industries, decided to help them with flooring. We got involved then,” he says. “We supply the installation. We supply the product.”

The program, Building For America's Bravest, provides “smart homes” for veterans with specialized requirements.

“This is for veterans who were injured pretty badly,” Essis explains. “Some have no legs. Some have no arms.”

Building For America's Bravest is an initiative of the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation. It honors Siller, a New York City firefighter who, though off-duty on Sept. 11, headed into the city to help, fighting traffic and running the last three miles carrying 60 pounds of gear, only to die when the towers fell.

Essis & Sons, which has stores in Lancaster, Harrisburg, York, Mechanicsburg, Chambersburg and New Oxford, has donated materials for 46 homes so far. Each of the six stores received a piece of the fallen towers.

According to the foundation website, smart homes include such features as “automated doors and lighting, wider doors and special showers to accommodate wheelchairs, cabinets and counters that can be raised and lowered, and central heating and air condition systems that can be controlled by iPads.”

Carpet One, a 30-year-old flooring chain, has 1,100 stores nationwide. Essis & Sons, which recently celebrated its 73rd anniversary, joined the chain nearly three decades ago, Essis says.

“I believe they’re giving a piece of the World Trade Center to every Carpet One store in the United States,” he says.

“They plan on building many more homes,” Essis adds. “We’re involved with this for the duration of our existence.”