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### Commentary

## Redefining housing for our veterans: Lake Houston project to serve as a destination

By **CASEY WALLACE** and **GUY RANKIN**  
May 24, 2009, 8:41PM

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Welcome to summer! Memorial Day weekend has become a most popular American holiday and tradition. It marks the beginning of summer and rings in a slower, more relaxed atmosphere where people enjoy recreation and each other.

However, marking the beginning of summer is not the purpose of Memorial Day. Now, more than ever, we need to pause and remember the true meaning of this holiday. Throughout history, America has relied upon the men and women of the military to serve and protect our country. Unfortunately, many of these years have seen us engaged in conflicts.

Memorial Day is a time to pause, remember and honor the veterans who lost their lives in defense of this nation.

Today is also the day to pause and honor those veterans who have survived. Today, we ask the questions — where are our veterans now? Are their needs being met? Do they have someone to care for them as they have so bravely served us? The answers to these questions should be simple, but they are not.

As more than 30,000 of our veterans return to Texas from Iraq and Afghanistan, how will they be welcomed home?

The Harris County Housing Authority (HCHA) plans to say “Thank you” in a tangible way. We have purchased 91 acres of waterfront

property located on West Lake Houston Parkway to develop a living monument to America’s veterans. This **master-planned community** will be the first of its kind and serve to redefine how this nation thinks about veteran housing.

A national model, Patriots by the Lake will stand as a tribute to America’s veterans and their families. The vision behind this one-of-a-kind mixed-use community is to provide housing, places of work, medical and ancillary support services, recreation and other amenities for our veterans. It will be a place for veterans to call home and also serve as a destination place for visitors seeking to pay tribute to our heroes.

Patriots by the Lake will focus on providing an array of housing options for our veterans, memorials to say thank you and a host of other amenities that express gratitude to all who have served as well as the supporters of those who served. The design and architecture of Patriots by the Lake will welcome veterans home with open arms and provide a beacon of hope to all who visit.

The crown jewel of Patriots by the Lake is a “Wall of Heroes” memorial in honor of the fallen servicemen and women of the Iraq and Afghan conflicts. This Wall of Heroes will be comprised of black granite panels with life-size images of our valiant heroes etched in stone. The Memorial Plaza will include a nearby chapel and also feature a streaming fountain and a glorious eternal flame. A beautifully designed place to contemplate the ultimate sacrifice our soldiers have made for our country, everyone will be invited to share in the experience.

In addition to the Wall of Heroes, the community will feature a series of monumental tributes. As you walk along “Patriots Trail,” you will recognize highlights of each war and each branch of service of our veterans. Replicas of some of the nation’s most famous monuments will be featured along with several new monuments designed especially for the 44 different parks and programmed open space that make up the Patriots development.

Patriots by the Lake will include a combination of residential options for veterans — from high-quality townhouses and condominiums to custom single-family homes, ranging from 2,877 square feet to 8,000 square feet.

In celebration of our veterans, Patriots by the Lake will also feature a Marina District, which will include a boardwalk, amphitheater, hotel, retail shopping and restaurants. It is anticipated that future Memorial Days in Houston will be celebrated here in full recognition of the true meaning of this national day of remembrance.

Infused with walking trails, Patriots by the Lake will be a livable community for veterans. They will be a short walking distance from medical services, health education programs, support services, retail and entertainment.

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Residents will have access to multiple social areas where they can meet and spend time together such as Town Hall and the Patriots Club and park. The general public also will have access to the Town Hall, which will reflect a patriotic theme and house a replica of the Oval Office and White House press room.

Patriots by the Lake will be a place of pride for the Houston region and a living monument for our troops.

We encourage you to pause at 3 p.m. on Memorial Day for the National Moment of Remembrance in honor of those who lost their lives while defending this great nation. Then, look to the future and envision the possibilities of Patriots by the Lake, a tangible expression of our gratitude — beyond words.

*Wallace is chairman of the board of the Harris County Housing Authority; Rankin is CEO of the Harris County Housing Authority.*

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**willrogerstx** wrote:

Nice idea but I have reservations about all the monuments and memorials being around where Veterans live.



(54)

I know that after nearly 40 years I have to put Viet Nam out of my mind constantly. I hide the books and photos and try to think of other things but it is still there almost constantly. Personally, having to face all those reminders where I lived would just be too much for me to handle.

5/25/2009 8:52:29 AM

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**HighAnxiety** wrote:

So, how much taxpayer money is going into this? Or should we not ask ?

5/25/2009 7:20:11 AM

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**tg11** wrote:

So, the City of Houston spent money on buying this piece of property for a project that so far hasn't the financial support nor the public support really, rather than allow someone to develop this "lakefront" property and earn the tax base off from it? What kind of tax base will they get from this project? If the veterans don't come to Houston then who will live here? This screams government subsidized housing to me. If it is the veterans in Afganistan and Iraq that we are looking to support, how on earth will this development be done in time for them to come home? This plan calls for 80' lots on the lake. Veterans can afford that? Where is the demonstrated need for a development like this? Many of these veterans already have houses and their families are already established in other towns, probably near bases and forts around the state and country, why would they come to Houston? It seems that this money could have been better spend by giving it to the VA for donation rather than buying a piece of property and giving the veterans a constant reminder of the fact that their brothers and sisters didn't come home alive with them.

5/29/2009 5:24:46 PM

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