

Volunteers help with makeover

Lucas family selected to have their dream of a custom built new home become a reality

- Richard Carrier Contributing Writer
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The Lucas family basks in the joy of seeing their new home, which was built in just four days by a host of local volunteers. *(photo by Eva Russo/ Media General News Service)*

The story is compelling: Spec. Michael Lucas' dream to build a home for his wife Jean and their two sons Henry, 11 and Joseph 6 was cut short in mid-hammer stroke when Spec. Lucas' National Guard Unit was mobilized and sent to Iraq. The partially completed house he was cobbling together on his own in Prince Edward County's rural Rice community had set open and deteriorating since late this summer. The Lucas' youngest son had been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Mother Jean Lucas had the added responsibility of home schooling her children, but there was a hidden blessing in this task. Her associates in the Home Schooling Association made the ABC Network television series Extreme Makeover-Home Edition aware of the difficulties the Lucas' were facing. Miraculously, they

were selected as the next family to have their dream of a custom built new home become a reality.

On December 2nd Spec. Lucas was flown in from Iraq, helicoptered to the Farmville National Guard Armory and driven to the house his family rents in Cullen, Charlotte County. The following day the family got Ty Pennington's surprise "Good Morning" wake up call and were whisked off to spend the week in Walt Disney World.

On December 4th 1,000 volunteers demolished Lucas' partial structure, turned the first spade of dirt and drove the first nail. Seven days later the Lucas family returned, stood in front of the volunteer army and behind a view- blocking bus to have Pennington reveal their federalist period home and a private collection building with his famous "Move that bus!" order.

A compelling story indeed, but certainly as compelling are the thousand stories created by the volunteers; the heroes and heroines totally responsible for literally building this dream for the Lucas family.

Less than one month before the December 4th start date, Ken Broadwater, owner of Broadwater Construction in Cartersville, received a phone call from the show's producer. Would he be interested in being the general contractor for an Extreme Makeover home planned for the area? "What would that entail?" Ken asked. Everything and everyone necessary to produce a top quality, turnkey home for a worthy family; skilled craftsmen, all materials, plans, permits, food, lodging, security, fire prevention, auxiliary personnel and a seven day construction window. And, after rounding up the 1,000 unpaid participants in the project, arranging for free construction material and supplies, keep the project an absolute secret until December 4th.

Ken asked for and was granted twelve hours to make a decision. He made a few phone calls to other local home building tradesmen, got their enthusiastic support and the following morning agreed to take on the responsibility. "It was an easy

decision for me” Ken Broadwater admitted. “It was the opportunity to help out a family struggling to survive while Spec. Lucas was off fighting for us.” His commitment, as well as that of many of the other participants in the project, required that he virtually shut down his business for thirty days. During the actual construction week he and his wife Laura lived at the site.

The only guidelines offered by Extreme Home Makeover were sample schedules of five previous builds and that the new home should be a Federalist style. No problem was the attitude of Powhatan residential designer Joni James, who set out to draw plans and produce blueprints for what would eventually be a two story, 2500 square foot home. Along the way the team decided that Spec. Lucas, a Civil War devotee, deserved his own special structure to house his memorabilia and that was added to James’ growing sheaf of blueprints. “It all turned out beautifully,” Joni offered. Her personal commitment involved one “47 hour day and a lot of 27 hour days,” in what was a total commitment of her time for a month. The “Private Collection Room,” constant changes made by the show’s staff and modifications required to accommodate the availability or non-availability of materials made her job “a 24-7 commitment” said Ken Broadwater. “We were making changes every day, including the last day of construction,” he added. Joni averaged three to four hours sleep per day, most of it on site in one of the dozen RV’s Laura had located.” It was a sacrifice, but a willing one” said Joni. “The adrenalin was flowing the whole time, but I was amazed to watch the crews work. It gave me such a sense of teamwork and the belief that we can do anything we put our hearts into.”

The mid-stream plan to add the collection structure brought Powhatan’s Dreaming Creek Timber Frame Homes into the mix. Dreaming Creek’s involvement was typical of how amazingly fluid the planning and construction processes were. When the team decided that Spec. Lucas was going to have his special building, Extreme Home Makeover approached Bob Shortridge by phone. This was on the Thursday before the Tuesday construction start. A face-to-face meeting the following morning resulted in Dreaming Creek’s commitment and preliminary designs were completed that night.” We worked through the weekend and by Monday we were

ready" said Bob Shortridge. "Ready" was plans and materials for an 18' by 24' "authentic architectural timbered" free standing building to house the Civil War memorabilia. The completely pegged, mortised and tendon post and beam structure went up in four hours on Wednesday, a project that would normally take three days, according to Bob Shortridge Jr. "The project fit a lot of needs for us" Bob Jr. said. "We are always looking for community projects and this gave us an opportunity to help this very deserving family. "It was an honor and a privilege to be involved," added Bob Sr. "I'd do it again. In fact we would like to do a complete project for them"(Extreme Home Makeover).