

By MARY ANN HELLINGHAUSEN

Updated: 01.20.10

As hundreds of blue-shirted volunteers and spectators chanted, "Move that bus!" the huge RV blocking the Beach family's view of their new home pulled away and the Kemah family gasped in surprise as their fairy tale continued. Before them rose a two-story, 6,340-square-foot home, painted pale teal with white trim, white pillars, Bermuda shutters and palm trees swaying in the yard. The grand "beach-style" home was built by more than 5,000 volunteers and more than 600 skilled laborers working round the clock for a week.

The Beach family, who had been living in trailers and tents since Hurricane Ike flooded their home, saw the new house for the first time last Thursday. "It's just beautiful. I can't wait to see it!" said Jackie Beach as she watched her son, Larry, his wife, Melissa, and their 13 biological and adopted children enter the house. "I can't think of anybody more deserving than they are," said the proud grandmother. The Beach's new house, with eight bedrooms and 4 1/2 baths, is the largest house built for "Extreme Makeover-Home Edition" in its 174 shows. The show is to air on ABC in March.

Magical interior:

Volunteers were eager to share details of magical interior that Extreme Home designers created for the family. One of the children's bedrooms has an "Alice in Wonderland" theme, with 3-D flowers and mushrooms popping out from the walls. A therapy room, created because so many of the Beach's adopted children have special needs, has a Kemah Boardwalk theme, complete with a lighted Ferris wheel and jelly fish lights. Outside in the backyard is a "crooked" playhouse complete with electricity. The house, which features an elevator, two utility rooms, and a two-car garage, is a high-efficiency home with solar power panels, said Blu Shields, president of Blu Shields Construction of Texas City, which coordinated the project. First Choice Power Company will give the family free power for a year, Gallery Furniture donated all the furniture for the home and Kroger donated food to stock their pantry, Shields said.

Extreme volunteers

In just four days, Houston-area Rotarians were able to raise almost \$100,000 to help offset the \$140,000-plus mortgage the Beach family carried on their old demolished home. "It's just amazing," said Space Center Rotary President Jon McKinnie. "Between Monday morning and Thursday, we raised \$86,000 that I was able to deposit into their account." The group has at least another \$10,000 in pledges, he said. The majority of the money came from business and individual members of Rotary clubs in District 5890 throughout the Houston area. With other donations of goods and services provided by Rotarians, "our humanitarian footprint was over \$150,000," McKinnie said. "People always come through and do more than you think they will." With more than 5,000 volunteers and 600 skilled laborers working shoulder to shoulder throughout the 106-day build, the process "worked like a well-oiled machine," said Kemah Fire Chief Larry Suniga. "At one point there were over 100 trades working in that house at one time." There were few injuries, mostly minor cuts and bee stings, he said, adding that

production crews put heavy emphasis on safety. Food for all those workers was coordinated by Melange Catering, run by Kemah City Administrator's sister Laurie Dodson, who estimated they coordinated at least 600 meals a day brought in by restaurants throughout the area. "Everybody has come together. It makes me proud to live here," Dodson said. "It's been amazing here - everybody was happy, even when they were freezing," she said, adding that the 900 cups of coffee a day brought in by a local Starbucks were lifesavers.

Star power

Despite miserable, rainy conditions, shuttle buses dropped off hundreds of bystanders at the site on Delesandri Street in Kemah last Thursday, many of whom were anxious to see TV stars involved with the show. Actress Jessica Alba greeted the family and sparked shouts from crowd. Pennington fired the crowd up before the "move the bus" segment was filmed, running along the perimeter and reaching out to fans.

Fairytale wedding

While the house was being built, Extreme Makeover sent the family to Disney World in Florida, where Melissa and Larry were able to renew their vows in a "fairytale wedding," with a horse drawn carriage, Larry's mother said. The couple, each now 40, married when they were 16 and 17, and didn't have much of a wedding, Jackie Beach said.

Donations needed

Blu Shields Construction still is in need of donations to help offset costs. For information on how to donate and who was involved in the project, go to www.blushieldsextreme.com.