

Volunteers gear up for ‘Makeover’

More than 2,500 helpers will be needed to build home in 106 hours

By K.O. Jackson
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On October 21st, when workers and volunteers of ABC TV’s reality show “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” start building a home in the Kokomo area, they are going to get hungry.

Very hungry.

Working around the clock for 106 hours from Oct. 21 to 28, Anderson-based Hallmark Homes Inc. and volunteers will build a home for a family within 30 miles of Kokomo. The volunteers will do in 106 hours what normally takes 412 days. The show builds a home for a family experiencing financial, illness and other issues. In addition, it shows how a community can come together for one family to make a difference in the entire community.

And that community gets hungry. Very hungry.

Friday morning, during a volunteer pep rally at Oakbrook Community Church, Randy Fletcher said he is prepared to feed the hungry masses that will be building the home and uplifting the community. Last October, the Peru man started **The Kreole Kid**, an on-site catering business. He said working with the TV show is an excellent way for him to celebrate his one-year anniversary.

“From what they told me, I will be the only vendor in the spectator section. I will have some Southern-style catfish, blackened dishes, barbecue and tenderloins. Every day, I will have at least two new items,” said Fletcher. “They said I should be ready for more than 1,000 people. That’s a lot.

“But Kathy Rogers [Program Development Director for the Hoosier Heartland Small Business Development Center] has done a fantastic job of getting me volunteers. I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for her.”

Rogers said Fletcher has been a HHSBDC client for more than two years. Her efforts to recruit volunteers has netted 50 so far. In addition to Fletcher, the home-building process will need more than 2,500 volunteers and reaching out to them has been “another way of networking,” said Rogers.

“It’s a good way of networking and good news spreads fast,” she added. “I am really impressed with the number of area small businesses that have stepped up and volunteered for this event. They don’t have the money or resources the big companies have, but they are more than willing to jump on board and volunteer. That has impressed me so much.”

The show's executive producer, Conrad Ricketts, told the audience at Friday's pep rally it will take 106 hours to complete the home, but it "only takes one hour of your time to change someone's life."

"This will be the most important house we build. There are people here without jobs. People who can't put food on their own table, but they are going to come help a family they don't know," Ricketts said, adding that when the show's semi trucks arrive in the still undisclosed neighborhood, if they were parked bumper-to-bumper, they would be more than three-quarters of a mile in length.

Although neighbors have been contacted about the "organized chaos" they will endure, Ricketts said the honored family won't be aware of the project until Ty Pennington, the show's star, knocks on the door to tell them about the project on Oct. 21.

In addition, during the building process, Ricketts said volunteers should "take a moment and step back to see what is taking place. We take one family and treat them as our own family. This show will be seen in more than 69 countries and 1 billion people will see how wonderful your city, county, state and nation is. This will be a moment that will change your life."

Besides building the home, there will be a family community day. There will be an American Red Cross blood drive, with a stated goal of getting 400 units of blood donated. There will be a food drive hoping to gather enough food to fill seven semi trucks. The food will be donated to area food banks.

"I don't know why they selected us," said Derek Wilder, president and CEO of Hallmark Homes, which has built 1,200 custom homes throughout the state since 1992. "This is very important to us. This is a chance to do something bigger than yourself and make a difference in someone's life. "It's going to be a big bash. My only wish is that it stays sunny."

Anyone interested in signing up to volunteer, donate or sponsor can visit www.hallmarkextreme.com.

The episode is tentatively scheduled to air in January. The show, which is in its seventh season, airs from 8 to 9 p.m. Sundays on ABC.

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