

Behind the Scenes of ABC's Extreme Makeover: Home Edition

Woodinville Lumber Uses Components to Turn Dreams into Reality

by Libby Walters

Between reality dating shows, extreme (more like insane) sports challenges and surprise-we're-giving-you-a-makeover-whether-you-like-it-or-not programs, many of us have had enough "reality." Don't turn that station yet. Not until the building components manufacturing industry gets some long-overdue press for its role in home improvement shows like ABC's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.

If you've ever seen the show, you know the drill: a down-on-their-luck family gets sent to a sub-tropical locale for a week while their home gets a complete floor to ceiling makeover. In the case of Season 2's Episode 11 (which aired January 9), the Dore family of Kingston, WA got much more than an extreme makeover, they got a brand new home.

If you are the ever-skeptical type who often yells "right—that could never happen" at your TV, don't retract that statement yet. It's not your fault. Often what makes good reality television content (translation: good ratings) isn't necessarily reality. Consequently, if you saw the episode, you didn't hear that Woodinville Lumber in nearby Woodinville, WA was behind the scenes and instrumental in making the Dore's dream of a brand new home come true in just five days. In other words, Woodinville put the reality in this reality show.

• • • About the Dores

A single mother of three, Roseanne Dore lost her home to a fire in March 2004. She soon found out that her insurance agent hadn't renewed her homeowner's policy, which left her unable to rebuild or clear the remnants of the burned structure from the lot. With no other option, she moved her daughters into the utility shed in the backyard, untouched by the fire. For many months, the girls went to friends' houses to shower. The entire family was stuck using an old doorless out-house on the property. To eat, they cooked on an outdoor propane camping stove. When not working hard to provide for her family as the local junior high school's assistant cook, Roseanne donates her property to the local Girl Scouts for campouts and outdoor excursions. The Dore's property is also the site of annual family reunions.

Phase One: The Commitment

"We can't do this project without Woodinville."

Larry Fowler is the Director of Forward Planning in Centex Homes' Seattle office. Centex has a workforce of 6,000 employees nationwide and represents over 90 markets in 25 states. Centex was contacted by the Master Builders Association (MBA) of Seattle in early October with an offer to be named builder on the Dore's home, he said. "When they offered us the chance to work on the project, all I knew is that it would be a house in Kingston [18 miles from Seattle]," Larry remembered. "We only had a few days to make a decision."

Centex's upper management from across the nation powwowed about the decision. "The show was still so new that we weren't quite sure what to be scared of," Larry said. "I remember watching the show every Sunday thinking, 'what a bunch of malarkey. They could never build a house in five days.'" Their decision was made on many conditions, one of which was that having Woodinville as a significant partner on the project would be vital to their overall success. "We knew Woodinville



Framing Schedule 6-8 am: Crawl Post/Beam/Plate/Garage Walls, 6-8 am: Pump House, 8-9 am: 1st Floor Panels, 9-11 am:

...had the capability and vast flexibility we needed to pull this off. They do components, framing and siding, and we needed their manpower and expertise to get the job done," he noted.

Phase 2: Organization/Preparation/Logistics

"We set the tone for the project."

Craig MacKay, President of Woodinville Lumber, got the call from Centex on Tuesday, October 20. He and Vice President of Operations Roy Schiferl decided almost immediately to volunteer for the project. By Monday, October 25, the Centex and Woodinville teams were holding the first of many meetings to organize the building process, discuss structural elements of the home, and plan for logistics. Larry paid Woodinville a great compliment regarding their organization early in the project. "One of my greatest memories of working with Woodinville was that first meeting. They had thought of everything before the meeting: from big picture logistics to any other constraints that we might have overlooked. They're component and framing experts; we looked to them to apply their experience to the job," he said.

Due to the enormity of "Project X" and the compressed timeframe in which it was to be completed, Centex drafted a complex flow chart of all possible items to coordinate and delegated responsibilities among 15 "stage captains." For instance, different Centex employees were chosen to head up on-site quality control, safety, PR/marketing, site utilities, trash and framing. The project's organizational charts were insane, Larry said. "The schedule itself started on a 25-foot piece of paper, which was eventually reduced to a double-sided 8-½ x 11, in fifteen-minute increments," he noted. Roy did the same, assembling a team of Woodinville's best to head up different tasks:

- **Fritz Pfaff** - Panelized the floors decks and roof systems for the porch and decks.
- **Kay McCaslin** - Headed up the wall panels, stairs and two fireplaces required for the project.
- **Brian Holt** - Coordinated the pre-finished siding on the preinstalled gable ends and oversaw the siding of the entire structure.
- **Jim Schumacher** - As chief delegator and motivator, he did a ton of PR for the company and encouraged the team to press on.



- **Dave Motter** - The Professional Engineer who oversaw all the design work and coordination with Centex, making sure the plans were accurate.
- **Wayne Bridgen** - Involved in providing enough extra materials (especially wood) on the jobsite (i.e., all the loose parts and pieces needed for construction).
- **Ronnie Adjutant** - Headed up the framing crew.
- **George Harris** - Coordinated dispatch and logistical transportation.
- **Roy Schiferl** - Selected and coordinated the team. Talked about what the scope of the project was, pre-planned the timeframes.
- **Brian Lampe** - Engineer-of-Record and On-site Engineer.

The production team gave Centex four weeks to draw up the plans, get them approved, communicate with vendors, order supplies and come up with a start-to-finish building schedule. Larry said, "We were begging for an extra week or two. This is a process we usually complete over a five-month time period for a house of this complexity. It was really overwhelming."

The Dore home was to be one of the most complicated that *Extreme Makeover* had ever seen. "We proposed one of our stock plans, but it wasn't accepted," Larry said. "The family had very specific requests and we had to figure out a way to accommodate them." In the end, the home covered an expansive 3,400 square

feet, with seven bedrooms and six baths. A 1,600 square foot deck was also added. To add to the complexity and the compressed building timeframe, the construction site presented a host of challenges for Centex and Woodinville to anticipate in the weeks leading up to the event.

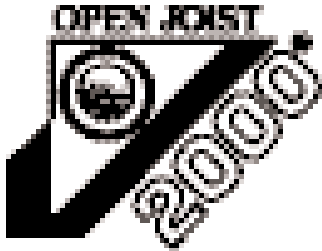
"At our first site visit, there were about 50 of us. We saw the burned structure, well system, the temporary shed the family was living in, horses, cows, boats and cars. The landscape was not flat at all. It was a tough site to work with given all the contours and existing structures," Larry said. The production crew allotted the first two days of the project to clearing the burned structure and the civil work it would take to restructure the new building site. A new well/plumbing system would also be installed during those first days. That left a total of five days—120 hours—in which to frame, side and decorate the Dore's new home.

Continued on page 30



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Continued from page 29

The site itself wasn't the only issue Centex and Woodinville had to contend with. Weather, the transport of materials onto the grounds and the logistics of squeezing a total of 700 volunteers, vendors, production crew, law enforcement and the public on the two-acre site. No small feat for two companies fighting to keep their regular customers and jobs from being held up by mammoth Project X. Woodinville Sales Manager Jim Schumacher said, "The one thing we said from the start was this project could not impede or jeopardize the work for our normal customers."

"We couldn't let our regular customers think that we could not keep up with their work," Roy noted. Centex had the same goal in mind. "Shutting down our business to complete this project was not an option for us. That took a big commitment from our staff and vendors throughout the planning phase," Larry commented.

According to Larry, Seattle's typical rainy fall season weighed heavily on his mind in the weeks leading up to the project. "Weather was my biggest concern. The only thing to do was plan for rain," he said. As we'll see in the following sections, componentization and pre-fabrication was the answer to the threat of rain.

Accessing the site proved to be another hurdle for Centex and Woodinville. The site was located off a remote peninsula, west across the Puget Sound, which meant that the most efficient way to transport materials to the building site was via the Edmonds/Kingston ferry. Covering about eight miles across the Sound, the ferry ride took about 30 minutes one way. The transport complications didn't end there.



From the ferry's drop-off point, there was only one access road into the property. "None of us were transportation experts, but it wasn't hard to see that there was only one way in and no way out," said Larry. It didn't take the team long to realize a temporary road would have to be built to ensure the smooth transport of materials, machinery and volunteers both in and out of the construction site. A traffic jam during the home construction would mean lost time. Not one minute could afford to be wasted if they were to complete the home on schedule.

Phase 3: Components Pre-Construction

"We knew componentization and pre-fabrication were the only way to go."

With just a few weeks to go until the opening day of taping, the Woodinville component design team waited anxiously for the final plans to come through their fax machines. Behind the scenes, design engineer Dave Motter of Tri-County Truss said the home design was a moving target. "Just when you thought they were set on the plans, they would move a wall or rearrange a room," he recalled. The compressed time schedule called for Woodinville technicians to assert great flexibility. "The people we had doing the truss and component design are top notch. They took the many changes in stride," Dave said. To keep other projects on schedule, Roy remembered that everyone pretty much turned around the design and manufacturing of components in a day within receiving the plans.

Early on in the scheduling process, one thing became clear: hauling prefabricated components was the only feasible way to frame the home in the scheduled timeframe. Roy said the team knew ahead of time that every piece—prefabricated decks, floors and walls—had to fit together like a puzzle.

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"Even the gable ends were pre-sided and pre-painted. That took a certain amount of innovation that I've never seen before," he marveled.

Continued on page 32



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Continued from page 31

The final details of the house were complicated to say the least. In addition to the family's living quarters and the extra space for a future bed and breakfast, Woodinville would design and manufacture all components for an attached two-car garage, 1,600 square feet of covered front porch, new horse shelter and a well house. The total square footage of components provided was over 5,000 square feet.

Phase 4: On Site at Project X

"You could feel the synergy in the air."

Woodinville's attitude going into the on-site building con-

struction was simple: failure was not an option. Roy said, "With this being televised nationally, if the project turned out to be a disaster, it wasn't going to be because of us." With their fierce drive in tow, Woodinville was ready for anything.

A deadline to have all components ready for transport by November 10 was set because the production company wanted them to be delivered at least two days ahead of schedule. Team members recognized George Harris' organizational tactics as the primary point of departure. He had received permission from nearby Kingston Lumber to use their yard as a staging and inventory control area. There, George and the logistics team sequenced all components on semi-trucks—14 in all—in the exact order in which they would be needed by the framing crew on the jobsite. "If you didn't have the right piece at the right time, it meant lost time," said Wayne. "George's materials sequencing was crucial because the walls couldn't arrive on a truck before the floors. That would spell disaster for the framing schedule," Kay McCaslin pointed out.

November 13: the day the components would be framed. The sense of adrenaline was ever-present. Ronnie Adjutant's framing team left Woodinville at 1:00 a.m. for the project site by bus, circumventing Puget Sound. They started framing at 5 a.m. instead of 6 as originally scheduled (see framing schedule). He scheduled 45 lead framers that day, creating teams of two and breaking them down into specific tasks. "Every guy had a partner to limit the amount of tools on site," he explained. "These are guys who typically don't work together, so I was really impressed to see how everyone got along. They just attacked it."

Even with the temporary road in place, the volume of transportation was a factor requiring constant attention. "The three-mile country road leading into the property carried a constant stream of vendors and VIPs destined for hospitality tents. There were dozens of semis parked all along the road and the police were on constant patrol," Brian recalled. The heavy volume of traffic ultimately erased the crew's two-hour lead on the production schedule. "At 11 a.m., we were exactly two hours ahead of schedule," Roy said. "We experienced a lull in activity because a truck carrying decorative driftwood for an art piece on the front lawn blocked our access.

Continued on page 34



Behind the Scenes...

Continued from page 32

We couldn't get the materials through," Ronnie said. Toward the end of the lull, plumbers and electricians were let into the structure earlier than scheduled, which created a literal power struggle. "I'd have ten guys on the roof and only one would have power," Ronnie said. Those were just a few of the unknowns that were impossible to predict in the pre-planning phase, Larry explained.

A quick 13-½ hours later, Ronnie's team had completed the framing entirely. "It was an absolutely incredible feat in my book," Larry gushed. "From the Centex stage captains to the various vendors to logistics, the house went up like nothing I've ever seen," he said. "Every component—from the floor, to the walls and roof—went together like magic. If there was ever a time to prove that components are the most efficient means of framing a house, it was this project," said Roy. Led

by Brian Holt, the Dore home was fully sided in another eight hours.

Several employees commented that trust in their co-workers played a big role in the process. "I realized I had to trust that the person in front of me would do their job accurately," George said. "Everyone was working to make the next guy succeed. That's how we operate at Woodinville," noted Kay. "It was a show of teamwork I've never seen before," Roy stated with pride.

George noted that the team learned to react very quickly to changes on site. "You talk about problem solving, this was the epitome." Wayne used the "duck in water" analogy to describe the collective Woodinville game face: "On the surface, it looked like we were gliding along the water, but underneath we were paddling like hell."

Fatigue is one of those unpleasant details that the television

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show doesn't spotlight. But don't be fooled, sleep deprivation was a factor during construction. For instance, Ronnie was up for 46 straight hours. Roy noted that enforcing proper safety was crucial because a majority of the volunteers were awake for a full 24 hours. "We made a point to make safety a primary focus," he said. A few Woodinville volunteers were sent home due to fatigue-induced mistakes. Larry reported that during the course of the construction, out of the 700 volunteers, there was one twisted ankle, one splinter and a cut. "Craig and Roy were very conscious of safety and focused on injury avoidance," he said.

Brian remembered the stress of balancing mental and physical exhaustion with the spiked adrenaline rush. "The problem was that there were framers on site for 12 hours, and the next team was ready to come in right behind you, all jazzed up and energized. The dynamic was hard to handle at times," he said. Witnessing all the trades on site working on a compressed timeline was raw talent at its best, said Larry. "It was a five-day non-stop adrenaline rush," he noted.

Phase 5: Coming Down.

"I have a greater respect for home-building."

Craig MacKay has been president of Woodinville since 1983. He commented on the things that surprised him the most about his company's involvement in Project X. "The most impressive thing about the project was it showcased all the abilities of Woodinville Lumber & Construction Services/Tri-County Truss in an extreme way: engineering and design, logistics, component manufacturing, and framing. And at the same time [it provided an opportunity to] be involved in a project that would give back to the community and help a family in need," he commented.

Members of the Woodinville team learned a variety of things following the experience. Kay said, "I think what we learned is that reality TV doesn't really reflect reality." Ronnie remembered the physical fatigue he felt following almost two consecutive says without sleep. "I crawled into my house. My legs hurt so badly," he said. Wayne commented on the sense of relief he felt when the project was done. George felt a strong sense of pride. "In our industry, you get very few times to showcase yourself. Project X was like showtime for

us. We'd worked a long time to get to this point," he said.

As for Centex, their gratitude for Woodinville's contribution to the project couldn't be more emphatic. Larry said a great takeaway from the project was the relationships they forged, like that with Woodinville. "To have leveraged all the local expertise and knowledge within our region was a huge thing for us. The relationship we created with Woodinville was amazing." Prior to Project X, Centex and Woodinville had not worked together on a regular basis. Larry noted Centex's interest in joining forces with Woodinville in the very near future: "We will be meeting in a few weeks to discuss future projects," he stated.

Continued on page 36

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Continued from page 35

Woodinville employees were mutually complimentary of Centex. George said, "Centex was very accommodating during our time on the construction site. In terms of logistics, they made us their first priority," he said. Brian Holt also commented that Centex did an extraordinary job in managing the project's logistics. "The thing went off without a hitch," he noted.

"In the end, we really did it for the cause, for the family," said Fritz. In addition to Woodinville's work on Project X, the company's total donations to the community and charitable organizations are nothing short of extremely generous: an entire framing package for a battered women's shelter, too many Habit for Humanity projects to count, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts. Roy is proud of the company's efforts to contribute to the community, but has no illusions about what that community involvement has done to make a name for Woodinville. "We have been very successful in getting out the message of the value of our components. It's a big reason that wall panel manufacturing has taken off for us," he noted.

Roy and Jim didn't have to do much in the way of PR for customers to recognize Woodinville's work on Project X. Jim noted that those who approached them after the fact said they knew it was Woodinville helping. "It really contributed

to the pride our group took away from the project," he said.

Jim continued, "I was most proud of our company for offering their JIT service. In a sense, that's what Woodinville has been able to provide to our customer base with increased frequency. And it allowed the construction cycle to take 16 hours instead of four weeks." Jim has big plans to get the most mileage out of Woodinville's involvement in Project X. In fact, plans are underway to create a DVD presentation of the construction and framing process that will highlight each aspect of company. "Our customers may be aware of some of the services we provide, but chances are they don't know of everything we have to offer," he said. "With the labor market's declining skill level, more customers will be ready to take advantage of what we can offer," Jim stated.

Woodinville's extreme new office building is the next big hurdle for the company to surmount. It is scheduled to be ready in mid-April and the company can't wait.

Larry said Centex was incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with Craig MacKay and the Woodinville staff. "I felt very fortunate to have been a little cog in this big wheel," he said. "Working with the great people of Woodinville was a pleasure. What an incredible privilege."

Congratulations to Woodinville on an extreme job well done!
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