



Florida Component Manufacturers Help Expand

Give Kids The World Village™

by Emmy Thorson-Hanson

This magical Village is expanding with the help of component manufacturers in Florida.

Central Florida is famous for its world-renowned theme parks and attractions, making it the ideal place to get away from the “real” world. Disney World, of course, is often at the heart of this fantasy. Growing up, all kids dream of visiting the Magic Kingdom, but for some, there is urgency to their dream. Each year over 25,000 children are diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses, and over half wish to visit Disney World and the other central Florida attractions such as Universal Orlando and SeaWorld Orlando. Often these children and their families’ daily lives are filled with doctors, hospitals and other things no child should ever have to face. (Source: www.gktw.org)

For these special children and their families, a week in central Florida is more than just a great vacation, it is a treasured week away from the harsh reality of the cards life has dealt them. In 1986 a man named Henri Landwirth realized that there was a need for a special place where children with life-threatening illnesses and their families could stay, so he founded a public charity called Give Kids The World (GKTW). He envisioned a fairy tale village that was whimsical and lighthearted. Children with life-threatening illnesses would be able to come and bring all members of their immediate family for an all-inclusive week-long stay...for free. In 1989, the Village opened its gates and ever since has been a haven for families from all 50 states, and over 50 countries outside the U.S.

Everything in GKTW Village is donated, from materials to time. Perkins Restaurant & Bakery provides all of the food that is served in the “Gingerbread House Restaurant.” Procter & Gamble supplies many in-kind needs, including the toiletries for all of the villas. And various companies provide materials used in the upkeep of the Village and grounds. There are over 3,500 volunteers who keep the Village running year-round.

Currently there are over 6,000 Wish Families that pass through the Village each year. But there are many more families that would like to. GKTW will turn no family away, so when they are booked they put families up at a nearby hotel.

In 1997 and 1998 GKTW undertook its first major expansion. With the help of numerous companies they were able to build 21 new villas, all of which were built with trusses donated from 18 different companies from all over Florida. The effort was organized through the Florida Building Material Association (FBMA).

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at a glance

- ❑ The Give Kids The World Village is the destination that many kids with life-threatening illnesses dream of.
- ❑ In 1998, component manufacturers from all over Florida donated 21 sets of roof trusses for an expansion.
- ❑ The Village will be undergoing another expansion, and members of the WFTA (WTCA’s West Florida Chapter) and FBMA are joining forces to help with the expansion by donating products and materials.




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Now their second major expansion is in the works, with Frank Eller (Project Manager for GKTW) heading up the development. "This week we have 102 families staying in the Village and 14 off-site, which means they have to drive here for meals and activities," he explained. "The faster we build more villas the better off we are." The goal is to bring the total number of villas to 240 over the next ten years. But in order to do this they need help.

Many of the companies involved ten years ago have already committed to helping this time around. 41 Truss was one

of the 18 truss manufacturers that donated trusses for the first expansion. To this day, a special picture from that first expansion is hung in a place of honor at 41 Truss. "When I go to visit 41 Truss and walk in the door the first thing I see is the picture of the 21 truckers who helped us [GKTW] ten years ago. By having that picture in their entrance it is like they are thanking me for letting them be a part of GKTW," commented Frank.

Gratitude & Frugality Encourage Donations

The appreciation that GKTW shows to all contributors is something that makes this organization stand out. Ross Bitterling with West Orange Lumber has known Frank for many years,

"When I have sat in on meetings it just blows my mind how all those people in the room work for different companies, yet they all want to help Give Kids The World, and they want to know how as a team they can help. Just think about how amazing that is."

—Frank Eller, Project Manager for Give Kids The World

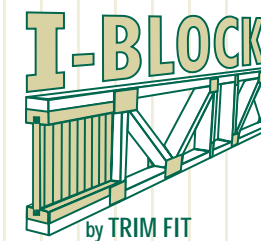
and has been involved with GKTW since meeting him. "In my 12 years of doing this, GKTW shows a true appreciation for the gifts that are given to them," said Ross. "There are other organizations that look for donations, and it always makes you feel good, but with GKTW you noticeably get that gratitude through what they say and do. Frank even comes to our place of business, which is a 45-minute drive for him, and he brings little gifts like cookies. But that's just the way he does things." Ross said West Orange opened a truss operation in November 2006, and expects both divisions to cooperate with GKTW to meet its future needs.

The feeling that GKTW is a unique organization is the consensus of everyone who has been involved with it. Doug LaChapelle from West Coast Truss shared why this charity has captured his heart:

"There are lots of companies that donate to organizations, and everyone really thinks their organization is worthy. And they are. But GKTW is an organization that is doing something for children, and if you go visit it touches your heart. It's a project that you just want to support. They do it, and do it right."

GKTW always welcomes visitors to take a guided tour of the grounds, which Ross said has made it easy for West Orange Lumber to donate. "One of the reasons we participate is because when we donate we like to see where and how [our products] are being used," he explained. "We can go out there anytime and see how our products are impacting these

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people who have things going on in their lives that are far worse than we can imagine."

There is one particular visit that stands out in Ross's mind. "The Chapel has walls painted like the sky. It is a room where people can go and pray, and there is a book where you can write messages about and to loved ones. When we went in that room it was very touching because we knew that our materials were part of that room, and seeing how much it meant to people."

Ryan Kaelin of Simpson Strong-Tie expressed another reason that many companies have a special appreciation for GKTW.

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One of the many delivery trucks that made the trek in 1998 to deliver sets of roof trusses for the GKTW expansion.



The Village expansion in 1998 consisted of 21 new villas, using roof trusses, that serve as a "home away from home" for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families during their week-long stay at the Village.



18 different truss plants donated components to Give Kids The World in 1997:

- Causeway Lumber Company
- Kimal Lumber Company
- Lumber Unlimited
- Raymond Building Supply Corp
- Smyth Lumber Co (now Stock Building Supply, Inc.)
- Florida Quality Truss, Inc.
- Southwest Structural Systems, Inc.
- True Truss (now True House, Inc.)
- Cox Lumber (now HD Supply Lumber & Building Materials)
- A-1 Truss (now SelectBuild)
- 41 Truss
- Forest Products Supply (now HD Supply Lumber & Building Materials)
- Trussway Ltd
- Carpenter Contractors of America, Inc.
- South Florida WTCA
- Production Truss (now Stock Building Supply, Inc.)
- Holmes Lumber (now Builders FirstSource)
- Ridgway Roof Truss Company, Inc.

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"With many organizations the hand is always out, but GKTW does a good job of getting you detailed plans of what they need," he said. "They don't ask for more than what is needed to complete the project and reach their goals. That is why whenever they ask for something you know they really need it."

Appreciation Goes Both Ways

Frank reciprocates this appreciation, amazed at how far the people in the structural building components industry will go for what they believe in. "I have been to a couple of association meetings for different trades that give to GKTW. It astounds me how everyone comes together as an association," Frank commented, noting that he's attended a WTCA chapter meeting recently. "Out in the world they work against each other, but they will come together to help a cause. It amazes me how you go to their meetings and everyone seems like family, even though when they are outside they are competitors."

But there is something else about our



Supporters of GKTW say that after you learn about it, it's impossible to not get involved. "It makes your want to dig down deep in your pockets to help," said Ross. "If you went there with your checkbook you'd be poor," meaning you'd be compelled to donate generously to the cause. Doug shares similar sentiments, "In order to appreciate it you almost have to go there. And it's hard not to want to help them once you have seen it. They do a great job with the kids."

Sharon Kircher [Simpson Strong-Tie] recalls her first visit to the Village. "The first time I went down I was wide-eyed with wonder at what the whole program is. You see the kids running around like they don't have a care in the world, even though you know they are battling a life-threatening illness.... and it makes your problems seem insignificant. You may have had a bad day at work but these kids are fighting for their lives...being there just really puts everything into perspective."

industry that Frank finds even more extraordinary. "The really impressive thing to me is that even as slow as things are right now, they [component manufacturers] still want to be involved," he said. This selfless generosity is something to be admired and respected.

Joining Forces to Double Efforts

These common values have brought FBMA and WTCA together to help GKTW. Doug explained how this joint effort came about: "Since FBMA had been involved before, Give Kids The World called them to ask for help with the expansion. FBMA is going to all of its members, (door, window, lumber, truss) to get help."

Since there are quite a few component manufacturer members of FBMA who are also members of WTCA and its West Florida Chapter, they brought the cause to the attention of fellow WTCA members. "A lot of the people who are members of FBMA and WTCA overlap. So between the two organizations there are a lot of people who can help," commented Doug.

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If WTCA members from all over the U.S. get involved in this project, think of the endless possibilities of what could be accomplished. Doug shared his point of view: "It doesn't have to be a project for Florida, it can be one for everybody. It's a project that if you learn about it you will support it.

And hopefully we can raise enough funds so that we can cover the cost of building trusses so no one company has to bear the cost." Through teamwork the WTCA membership has the potential to make a huge difference for this very special organization if we all participate in some way, shape or form.

Ralph Del Valle encourages everyone to get involved, and he explained the common thread that links us all to this wonderful cause: "I think that the reason so many people sympathize with this organization is because we all were kids at one time and got lucky enough to mature and grow up. But to see a kid that isn't guaranteed that opportunity...it's tough to swallow. If you get involved in GKTW, the only regret you will have is not being able to give more." **SBC**

For more information about Give Kids The World please visit www.gktw.org. If you or your company is interested in supporting Give Kids The World, contact Frank Eller at 407/973-5204 or franke@gktw.org.



GKTW Family Testimonials

"...Everyone we encountered at the Village was so nice and helpful. It was so nice to be in a place where there were no stares and there were no 'can't's.' I have often said in a joking manner that there needs to be an 'island' where we can go so our kids will be judged for all they are, instead of all they are not...well, it was a dream, but then we found Give Kids The World and I think I found my 'island.' Give Kids The World is by far the closest my family will get to being in heaven without actually being there. I am sure in my heart of hearts that the Village is right on the edge of heaven." —Holli's Family, Texas

"We just wanted to thank everyone for our time at Give Kids The World Village. It was a dream come true in so many ways for us. Never before have we felt so at peace and comfortable... or so humbled. To see the sparkle of joy in Edward's eyes was absolutely wonderful. And to see the love and caring you showed us really touched our hearts and brought a ray of hope to our cloudy days. YOU are truly angels in our eyes and will be in our hearts and in our prayers." —The Potter Family

The Dawn of a New Age for the Structural Building Components Industry

Construction is progressing at a steady pace on WTCA's SBC Research Institute, the structural building component industry's research and testing facility in Madison, WI. The 5,730 square-foot facility is scheduled to officially open later this year and advance the industry's goal of developing a fresh body of knowledge that will add new value to the industry and lead the next generation of growth.

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