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Paul DiMeo of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" advises AstraZeneca employees on building benches Thursday.

AstraZeneca employees build benches to benefit heart health

'Extreme Makeover' star raises awareness of high cholesterol levels

By ERIKA BERAS
Special to The News Journal

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

A little bit of Hollywood came to town to build benches Thursday.

Paul DiMeo, one of the stars of the popular reality show "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," was in Fairfax to raise awareness about National Cholesterol Education Month.

On his show, DiMeo supervises the building of hastily built, sturdy homes that are presented to needy families. At the event held by drug maker AstraZeneca, employees built benches under DiMeo's guidance. The 12 benches, along with \$5,000, will be donated to cardiac centers at the end of the month.

"These benches are going to go all over the country," he said, "It's proof that a little bit of health and help go a long way."

Twelve teams from different divisions in the company worked on the benches, which took 45 minutes to an hour to build. After assembling them, they took turns engraving and stain-

ing them. It was launched by WomenHeart, the Association of Black Cardiologists and AstraZeneca, which has U.S. headquarters in Fairfax, to promote discussion of the dangers of high cholesterol and the benefits of lower cholesterol levels.

ing them.

Tynetta Brown, an AstraZeneca manager who also works with the Association of Black Cardiologists, gripped an electric engraving pen and carefully stenciled "Take Health to Heart" on her teams' wooden bench. Her co-workers jokingly nicknamed her the "Burning Diva."

"This is one craft kit my mother didn't get me," she said.

Before debuting on the ABC show in 2003, DiMeo had built a career of renovating living, working and performance spaces in New York and Los Angeles. He knows construction. But he also knows about the region and cholesterol.

"I'm from Media [Pa.], so I'm a local boy. And I also suffer from high cholesterol," he said.

DiMeo is one of the 65 million American adults suffering from the disease, which is brought on by various factors, including poor diet and physical inactivity, according to the National Heart, Blood and Lung Institute.

"We work with different groups to promote heart-healthiness year-round, but September is the month in which we concentrate our efforts," said Susan Dambrauskas, a representative of the institute.

As a spokesman for the cholesterol-management campaign, DiMeo appears at many events that utilize his skills and fame.

DiMeo kicked off the bench building by pep-talking into the bullhorn, a tradition on the show.

"They're having a great time. You can tell who is used to doing stuff around the house and who not-so-much," DiMeo said.