

# INTERVIEW

**Paul DiMeo**, co-host and carpenter on ABC's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, is known for his care and creativity when working on children's rooms.



# Through the Eyes of a Child —

## *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition's* Paul DiMeo

Paul DiMeo just won't grow up. And this exuberant co-host of ABC's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, wants it that way. A master carpenter, with a passion for the theater to match his love of building, DiMeo has truly found his dream job. And he is like a kid in a candy store. "It's just a blessing for these two worlds to come together this way," says DiMeo. "And to be able to change someone's life at the same time — that's just the ace in the hole."

Each episode, the Emmy Award-winning *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* team swoops into the lives of a family facing seemingly insurmountable challenges, and in one short week, transforms their run-down homes into, not just showplaces, but custom spaces, molded to serve these family's very special needs.

DiMeo. Even in the frantic pace these extreme projects demand, DiMeo takes the time to get to know the children of the family. He explores their special treasure boxes for clues to what's really close to their hearts, and then builds the spaces that fulfill those close-held dreams.

### A LIFELONG PASSION

DiMeo got his start in carpentry as a child himself; at the age of five, after a devastating fire destroyed his family's Pennsylvania home, DiMeo worked side-by-side with his father to rebuild the house, and a lifelong passion for building was kindled.

While in college at Point Park College in Pittsburgh, DiMeo successfully combined his theatrical aspirations with his carpentry skills, building sets for the Pittsburgh Playhouse and acting as stage manager for the American Dance Ensemble. This, as it turned out, would be the ideal training ground for both the break-neck pace of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, as well as the art of stretching a budget to its very limit. "We're talking about re-using screws to

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— Paul DiMeo, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*

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DiMeo, with his oversized glasses and infectious enthusiasm, has been known to shed a tear or two as these special families tell their stories. (ABC cites his official title on the show as: Carpenter/Attitude.) And he is most ebullient when working with the children. "I really do find some of my best ideas listening to these kids," says

One of his favorite projects was the "Bunkosaurus," a whimsical bunk bed crafted for three dinosaur-crazy young boys. With plywood and paint, this creation took on the shape and color of a brontosaurus, complete with scaly skin and a top-bunk slide for a tail.

save a few cents," laughs DiMeo. "And that hectic build-up to opening night — now our families coming home to their new house, that's our opening night."

DiMeo views the *Extreme Makeover* team's job as not just changing the life of one family a week, but also bringing the inspiring stories of people who struggle with, and triumph over, incredible





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< Paul DiMeo and Ty Pennington coordinate a makeover for the Turner Family, who were left homeless after a fire destroyed their home.

show will focus more on the family's story and what's going on right there, that week.

When asked about his favorite episode, DiMeo is quick to respond: "Camp Barnabas was my favorite build," he says. In this episode, the Teas family, owners and operators of a non-profit camp that caters to the needs of some 1,000 critically and chronically ill children every summer, got a desperately needed renovation to the home they had long put second to their beloved camp. "Just knowing that so many kids, with such profound challenges have a place to go and just be normal for a summer," says DiMeo, "Seeing them rappel on the rocks and swim in the river — rewarding doesn't begin to cover the range of emotions. That's what I'd like to be remembered for."

And it's that childlike effervescence and unchecked emotion that so endears this carpenter extraordinaire to millions of viewers every week. ■

KELLY MCCALL BRANSON IS A FREELANCE WRITER.

difficulties — from physical challenges, to autism, to the loss of a parent — to millions of viewers. "We have America's ear," says DiMeo, "and this amazing opportunity to tell a story about truly courageous people who have risen above their particular limitations." It's a story this carpenter/co-host believes translates to anyone watching. "These children, they just take their challenges in stride," he says. "They make me realize that we all have limitations of one kind or another, and they are just awesome in their phenomenal can-do attitudes."

DiMeo applies the lessons learned from these unforgettable kids to his approach to extreme makeover-carpentry. "First, I try to see things through the eyes of a child," he says. It's that think-outside-the-box, anything's - possible mindset that makes what could be ordinary renovation projects into truly magical transformations.

But DiMeo is quick to point out the importance of practical planning and

logistics — especially when you're working on a seven-day timeline. "First and foremost, I have to ask and learn, from others who know more, about the specific needs of the family," says DiMeo. "For instance, how can we build a better environment for an autistic child, through music, movement and touch?"

DiMeo says that in order to get the project done, he has to just forget about the cameras. "I'm a carpenter, and I have a job to do, and that has to be my focus," he says. "It's the cameramen I really feel for!" In the end, some 300 hours of tape are edited down to 43 minutes to document the construction, the transformation and the family's amazing story.

And there are always unexpected curveballs in every episode. "The weather is our biggest challenge," laughs DiMeo. "If you are in the middle of a record-breaking drought, just send us there, and rain will fall."

This season, as *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* travels to every corner of the country, DiMeo reports that the

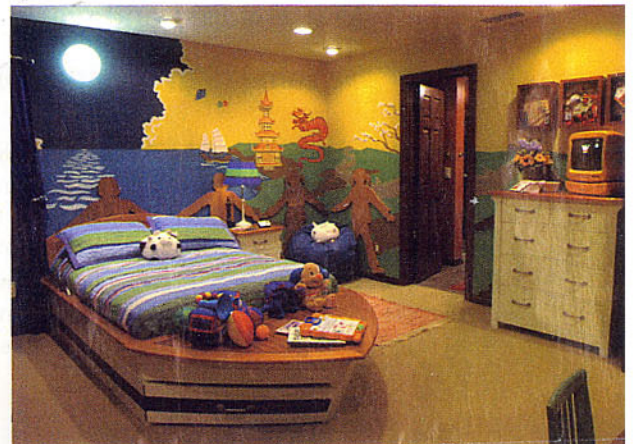
## In Case You Missed It!

Paul DiMeo and the entire *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* Crew were in Raleigh this December. Look for photos and details in our Spring Issue coming out in April!

Creating > special havens for the children featured on the shows has been a priority for Paul DiMeo.



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