



Posted on: Saturday, June 9, 2007

Despite challenges, volunteers up to 'Extreme' task

 [Photo gallery: Extreme Makeover House](#)

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By [Will Hoover](#)
Advertiser Staff Writer

Cameras rolled and spectators craned their necks yesterday as dozens of blue-shirted, hard-hatted construction workers swarmed from top to bottom over the makings of a two-story house in Kalihi Valley, where two days earlier there had been nothing but bare ground.

Nearby, more teams moved in fast motion to complete a second 3,500-square-foot building, roughly the same size as the house, that when completed will be the Keiki O Ka 'Aina Family Learning Center, a nonprofit education facility dedicated to offering cultural programs to Native Hawaiians who would otherwise not be able to afford them.

Both buildings are to be built from scratch in seven days.

It was all part of the 50th State's contribution to the ABC-TV series "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." The Hawai'i episode will open the show's fifth season, and marks the biggest project the show has ever attempted.

Accomplishing such a monumental task requires some 3,000 volunteers, according to the show's brass. The entire effort — time, materials, equipment — is 100 percent gratis. At any given time, around the clock, some 150 to 300 workers are sawing, pounding, sanding, excavating, painting and doing everything necessary to finish the two structures on the tight deadline.

Show host Ty Pennington informed Theresa "Momi" Akana of 3030 Kalihi St. on Wednesday that she and the five members of her family had been selected to receive the show's next home makeover. For more than a decade, the family has been living in a small, dilapidated structure in Kalihi that had served as both living quarters and learning center.

Akana, a single mother on welfare when she founded KOKA 11 years ago, had used her food stamps in the beginning to supply snacks for the center. Her welfare check was regarded as her paycheck for the services she provided for families.

These days, she's an advocate for single moms who are struggling to comprehend the welfare system, and she's started a program to help mothers in prison get counseling and parental training. The family was sent away on vacation in Canada until they return next week and take their first look at their new home and learning center.

Cast member Paul DiMeo said from the start Hawai'i has been special.

"I will say this — it is the most beautiful place we've ever been," he said. "We started last year in Alaska, and that was absolutely gorgeous. And here we are starting our fifth season here in Hawai'i, and everybody here's really excited about this project, and certainly about this family.



Workers move quickly to build one of two structures going up at the "Extreme Makeover" site. The project is a round-the-clock effort.

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TO SEE IT

Because of limited access to the construction site, people who want to see the house built should park at Aloha Stadium and take a shuttle bus to the job site. Parking and the shuttle are free.



Excavation work on the "Extreme Makeover" site in Kalihi is just one of the many tasks that are taking place around the clock.

"Here's a woman who has given everything to help others, and that's the story we're really telling here."

DiMeo was awed by the precision crew coordination that had been orchestrated by the man in charge, Jeff Prostor, president of Brookfield Homes Hawaii.

Prostor somehow kept hundreds of workers from local building trade organizations, tons of equipment and supplies, and dozens of tractor-trailer truck loads of building materials humming along as smoothly as what DiMeo described as "a well-oiled military deployment."

Essentially, Prostor has been tasked with accomplishing in a week what it would normally require six months.

Prostor called it "a good learning experience — a way to create teamwork and think about how you can do things better and more efficiently."

Still, there had been challenges. For one thing, near-constant showers had hampered the project since it began on Wednesday.

It wasn't enough to dampen spirits in this camp.

"We worked right through that," Prostor said. "We've handed out more than 800 ponchos over the last two days, and everyone worked all the way through the night in the pounding rain."

Some volunteers said they considered themselves lucky to be asked to help. David Fairchild, 46, who's with the Sutton Construction company, said it was like a dream come true.

"I have shed tears watching this program," said Fairchild, of Mililani, who was helping to build the home's deck. "It makes a grown man cry, almost. We didn't know if this program would ever come to Hawai'i — but, hey, we're one of the states, too. So, for me, this is like a dream."

Reach Will Hoover at whoover@honoluluadvertiser.com.

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