

Claffey's paints TV show makeover house

By Ben Cape

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NORTH BEND - Kevin Kalberg gave an idea of what Claffey's Painting accomplished recently when he described the spectacle of the home site they helped finish in under a week.

The North Bend painting company was one of multiple subcontractors who volunteered labor, materials and sleep to build a custom home for the television show "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" in Kingston. The production, from demolition of the old house to the handing over of keys for a brand new home, lasted seven days, and Claffey's painted for five of them. Kalberg said watching the nearly 1,500 people work on the home was a sight to behold.

"When you approached the site at night, it looked like a stadium with the floodlight glare above," Kalberg said. "It was just this dance of people and machinery, and the ebb and flow of everything was amazing."

Kalberg and his co-workers at Claffey's knew the project would be an amazing feat from the very beginning. Claffey's owner, Francis Claffey, was first notified about the plan last month. Claffey's had worked in the past with Centex Homes, the contracting company that would build the home, and was asked to paint the house. The house would be built with all-volunteer labor and materials for the show, which remodels and rebuilds homes at break-neck speed while cameras roll. A single mother with three daughters from Kingston had been chosen to receive the home. The family was notified on Nov. 10 that they were to pack up their stuff for a one-week Disneyland vacation and that when they returned, they would have a new home.

"It was an easy decision [to get involved]," Claffey said. Prior to the family finding that they had been picked, there had been secret planning sessions and meetings between Centex, the various subcontractors and the show's producers. Claffey's couldn't tell anyone they were involved until Nov. 10, when demolition began. Claffey and everyone at his office were eager to be part of the show, not only because it was a noble cause (the Kingston family's house had burned down and they were living in a shack), but because it would take nothing less than a miracle to get it done. Claffey's employee, Anna-Stina Lagerquist, said the average home takes 85 days to build from beginning to end. Claffey's and their fellow subcontractors had five days following demolition.

"We wanted to see if it could be done," said Lagerquist. While all of the planning that could be done was done, there was still a huge possibility of error. When the crew for Claffey's showed up at 7 a.m. on Nov. 14 to start painting, they still had no idea what colors they would be using. They ended up using more than 20 colors, seven of which were changed by the designers during construction. Also, Claffey's was originally supposed to paint only the inside of the house, but the muddy work site had made the exterior dirty. Claffey's ended up painting the outside, twice.

The timeline was unruly. Claffey's had five days to paint a 3,700-square-foot home that had six bedrooms and seven bathrooms. It was a custom home as well, so there was no prior floor plan the crew could study to figure out how they would approach the project. The house was at the end of a narrow, one-way, two-mile dirt road that allowed for speeds of only slow and stop to and from the job site.

A lot of work to be sure, but the Claffey's crew was amazed how well and how hard they worked under such conditions. Claffey's brought over multiple painters who worked in shifts. Some managed to grab some sleep at the one room they had at a Kingston hotel, but most put in long days before collapsing for a few hours of sleep and then working again. They worked alongside and under the watchful eye of other subcontractors who were also trying to get as much done as they could in the allotted time.

The crew could not get over, however, how well everyone worked together. In a construction industry where finger pointing, cursing and bad attitudes are part of a normal day, Lagerquist said there was remarkable cohesion between everyone on the job that allowed it to be the most enjoyable working experience a lot of them had ever had. No one got on the other for failing to do their job, rather, everyone wanted to do more.

The last people usually to leave a job site are the painters and finish carpenters, so some members of the Claffey's crew were still there while the family was on their way to their new home just before noon on Nov. 17. Near the frantic end of the job, everyone was helping do everything, so painters were hanging pictures and electricians were hanging lamps. Kalberg's shoes were grabbed by someone else on their way out, so he got to watch the presentation of the home to its owners while standing in the mud. It was worth it.

"It was emotional," Lagerquist said.

The crew was exhausted when they returned to normalcy last week, and Kalberg said coming back to work was like returning after a trip to Disneyland, but Claffey's has tried to make volunteerism a normal part of its business. The company has donated its services to homes that serve as shelters, such as the battered women's shelter, Momma's Hands, outside North Bend, and they said Claffey has wanted to give back to his home community. They said the show ended up being an afterthought to the reality of what people could do when united under a common cause, and they hope that is what they can bring back to the Valley.

"I am truly amazed," Kalberg said. "I was inspired."

It is not known yet when the "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" episode featuring the Kingston home will be aired.

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