

'Makeover' home pays off in goodwill

BY CAROLYN STEEVES

CHARLOTTE — Charlotte builders and designers who donated their services to "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" said that while the experience was personally rewarding, the publicity didn't necessarily bring in new business.

Ed Estridge, president of JED Development, was on the team that spent five days last August building a new home for Curtis and Alisha King and their three children.

He said he has not seen a jump in business that he can attribute to the show, which aired on ABC in October.

"But I truly believe that if we were in a little different of an economic environment, we would definitely have reaped some rewards from it," Estridge said. "With lending the way it is right now, it's hard to get anything done."

Richard Merlini, chief executive officer of American Heartland Homebuilder, has built two houses for "Extreme Makeover," the Charlotte home and one in Michigan. As a newcomer to Charlotte, participating in the show helped raise his company's profile, Merlini said.

But, like Estridge, he said, "Has it gotten me any business? No."

"Just about the time (the show) aired, things started really getting bad with Wachovia and everything else and there's just not a lot of movement in the industry," Merlini said.

Initially, when ABC asked him to build a second house in Charlotte, Merlini declined.

"I had just moved my family (to Charlotte) and I was a relatively new company," he said. "I'd done one of these builds before and I understand the complexity of them."

Merlini consulted with Estridge, with whom he was doing business at the time,

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and Estridge encouraged him to reconsider.

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After the two obtained offers of help from Stock Building Supply, which donated materials for the new home, Duke Energy and other companies, Merlini said he found himself thinking, "Boy, I've already got three-quarters of this house donated."

While business has not spiked as a result of the show, Estridge said, "Those relationships we created will last forever, and when times get better, I think we'll all be able to help each other out."

Merlini echoed his optimism.

"For what reasons are you doing the 'Extreme Makeover' builds?" he said. "Are you doing it for the publicity or are you doing it to try to help somebody out?"

The King family was chosen to appear on the show from among thousands of nominations submitted by residents around the country. This was the first episode of "Extreme Makeover" to be filmed in Charlotte.

Carolyn Steeves is a staff writer for
The Mecklenburg Times. Email her at
carolyn.steeves@mecktimes.com.