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Extreme conditions challenge Sunday's 'Makeover' crew

Architecture student from Franklin helps make dream come true



Ben McCreary and his wife, Amanda, were part of the design team participating in this week's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.
SUBMITTED

By **MISSY McADAMS**
Staff Writer

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The phrase "Bus driver — move that bus!" is what the viewers wait for on ABC-TV's hit reality show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.

That's when a bus is moved to reveal the home construction makeover to the recipient family.

Ben McCreary and his wife, Amanda, were lucky enough to be part of the collaborative design team for this Sunday night's two-hour special episode. Ben McCreary,

who grew up in Franklin and graduated from Brentwood Academy, is a fifth-year architecture student at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. Amanda McCreary, a 2004 Virginia Tech graduate, works at Building Specialists Inc. in Roanoke, Va., as an architectural designer.

Building Specialists collaborated with the *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* design team to create and build a new house for professional dancer Carol Crawford-Smith and her two school-age sons.

A few years ago, after experiencing numbness and fatigue, the founder and artistic director of The Center of Dance in Blacksburg was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Today, though she can no longer demonstrate the moves herself, Crawford-Smith continues to provide instruction, workshops and programs in dance-theater.

ABC decided it wanted to do things a little differently on this build so they opted to include a student design team comprised of architecture students and two faculty members — an assistant professor of architecture and the director of the Industrial Design program.

"ABC wanted to involve the university in the project to make it different," Ben McCreary said. "At first it was pretty daunting. They (ABC) asked to see a plan book, but the company designs custom-made homes." So instead, Building Specialists had to present ABC with a house plan that would work.

Once they had the plan, the group had three weeks to put together a design and finalize the plans and one week to purchase all the materials.

"ABC contacted us at the beginning of November and the house was built by the first week of December," McCreary said.

But that wasn't the biggest challenge of the build. The biggest challenge wound up being the weather. ABC said it was some of the worst weather the show's cast and crew has had to build in, McCreary said. "I don't think it ever got above 25 degrees the entire shoot. That Monday, which is 'move out day,' it snowed 6 inches."

Later in the week, he recalled, they were trying to get termite spray into the gravel foundation when the spray froze in the lines. McCreary said they borrowed neighbors' hair dryers so they could thaw out the spray in the lines. It worked, but they were still running behind schedule.

And if that wasn't enough, he mentioned that when they got half the roof on, it started to sleet and that night it iced over. "We had crews that couldn't get to the location because of the conditions and road closures."

Even with the bad weather and other obstacles, they still managed to get the house finished on time. McCreary said 800 subcontractors and more than 2,000 volunteers worked at the site.

"People were selflessly giving up their time. It was a pretty inspiring thing to see a house come together that fast," he added. "It's hard to verbalize how it makes you feel — the experience of being there and seeing it unfold right before your eyes. It was very rewarding."

"I was very pleased how it turned out. And (Carol Crawford-Smith) really can't see the house until the bus moves away. It was very exciting to watch, especially the reveal, seeing someone so happy that we gave them such a fantastic gift. Her joy was contagious."

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