

The Farmville Herald
December 5, 2007
Extreme Surprise
Local Couple Gets New
Home Through TV Show

By ROB CHAPMAN

PRINCE EDWARD — Michael Lucas was looking forward to coming home. A specialist with Charlie Co. 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry of the Virginia National Guard serving in Iraq, Lucas was due some mid-tour leave time just before Christmas.

When he got home, however, he found a surprise.

An *Extreme* surprise.

He and his wife, Jean, in a coordinated announcement, were told they have been selected for a new home from *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.

"It's been an amazing journey so far," Lucas says, standing feet away from a 2008 black, stretch limo Ford F-250 that would soon whisk the couple and their two boys away for a Florida vacation to Disney World.

It's the American Dream, he says of receiving a new home, to have that security and safety for your family.

"It's what we fight for," says Lucas, still dressed in battle fatigues, "and it's what we live for."

He wished the builders "God-speed and thank you."

The sun was going down on a whirlwind day that began early that morning with Lucas landing in a helicopter at Farmville's Armory. A caravan that included the reality TV's show's famed "bus" made its way through the winding back roads to the rental home in Darlington Heights, an estimated 80-year old structure, to reunite the family and to formally kick off the beginning of what promises to be an amazing week.

Construction at the Bradshaw Road (State Route 603) site in Rice will hit like a whirlwind Wednesday.

The announcement, Jean cited, came "exactly like...you expect it. It's (the show's Design Team Leader) Ty Pennington saying 'Good Morning Lucas Family.'"

And that was followed by the surprise of her husband stepping off the bus. It was what Jean describes as a "double shock."

"It's great," assessed 11-year old son, Michael Henry. "I'm happy to have my dad home and I'm happy I'm going to spend a week with him."

Married since 1995, the couple never owned their own home. Lucas, prior to his deployment, had started building in the Rice area—there's a foundation, the framing of the first floor and a well and septic system.

But that has just been sitting, waiting as Lucas served in Iraq, like a dream on hold.

Now that dream is about to become as tangible as a new roof.

"My gosh, I can't even believe it," Jean says. "I can't believe it. We've never had our own home. We've never owned a home. Unbelievable. And everybody has just been so nice...."

Lucas also commented, "I'm standing here in nervous anticipation and I'm just in awe of the whole circumstance. And...the word of the day is 'surreal.'"

The Lucas family (which also includes six-year-old Joseph), Jean cites, were nominated by Stephanie Sloper and Lindsay Webb, of Charlotte County, who are part of their home-school group.

They knew, of course, that the two had put the application in for them. It is something that Jean felt was "absolutely no way" was going to happen.

"Thank you so much to them," she said to her friends. "And they've just been so supportive with Michael gone...."

Over the course of the next week, builders will begin to work their magic at the 3.7 acre site near the Prince Edward side of High Bridge. The plan is to incorporate some of Michael's work, but eventually the new home will be about 2,500 square feet.

The Florida trip is a first for the boys, who have never been on a real family vacation.

The work on the new home will kick into high gear Wednesday and, amazing as it may seem, with a schedule to get furniture Sunday and the "reveal" moment to the family at some point Monday. An exact timetable has not yet been established, but spectators will be welcome for the event. (See Friday's *Herald*.)

A family company of Ken Broadwater Homes LLC, of Cartersville, has lined up a crew of subcontractor and vendor partners to do the construction. They will collaborate with local volunteers (which will include National Guard members) to build a home from Wednesday to Monday.

"We're looking at it just like...building any home, you know" said Broadwater. "We're going to build this home just like we plan to live in (ourselves), like we do all the other ones. Probably the method of doing it's probably just a little different."

Well, yes, considering they average building 15 houses a year.

Broadwater speculated this would be roughly a 2,500-plus square foot home, noting that they have been working back and forth with architects probably the last week or so. He has also lined up familiar help. Two cousins will help on the build team, one of which is a contractor in Maryland and another who is a contractor in West Virginia.

It will, of course, be round-the-clock construction; twelve hours on, twelve hours off never leaving the site. (That's the commitment, but workers probably work even longer hours.)

Subcontractors are also volunteering. They'll have an estimated 50-60 sheetrock hangers on the job, 20 insulators. Some are taking time off of their paying jobs to help. Major supply people have also stepped up, Broadwater cited. One firm is supplying all of the brick.

"It's a great show," Broadwater said. "It's always...emotional...trying to help people, you know. ...This story is no different."

Darlington Heights

The "bus" was in front of the Lucas' rental home mid-day in Darlington Heights and some neighbors were taking an understandable interest.

"This is something big for little old Darlington Heights," offers neighbor Bill Hamilton.

There is little along the otherwise non-descript section of the Darlington Heights Road. On top of the hill and almost within site of the rental home is Triumph Baptist Church and travelers coming from Hampden-Sydney pass by the VFW.

It is a typical country road, although it does have painted yellow lines.

In the Lucas' family yard is a yellow ribbon around a large oak tree.

It's been challenging for the military wife. Lucas' outfit trained from June to August in Mississippi, arrived in Kuwait in late August and moved into Iraq in early September, where their mission includes providing convoy security.

"It's definitely harder than you think it's going to be," Jean would later comment on being a military wife. "A lot harder."

Lucas' tour isn't over, but he will soon have a new house to come home to.

It will, of course, be an interesting week—not so much in Darlington Heights any more, but in Rice.

Still, the handful of onlookers had a moment. As Pennington walks across the family's yard near the bus neighbor Shelby Atkins calls out to him to wave.

Pennington smiles and obliges.

(Those who would like to volunteer can go on line to extremekenbroadwaterhomes.com.

While they have all the professional contractors needed, it is estimated that 100-200 volunteers per day will be needed for traffic control, clean-up, catering, shipping and other miscellaneous duties. Volunteers will report to the site and must wear work boots or closed toe shoes and appropriate work clothes. Shifts are being worked out in four-hour increments. Volunteers must be at least 18 years of age.)