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'Extreme Home Makeover' engages Tiffin firm

September 4, 2011

By MaryAnn Kromer - Staff Writer (mkromer@advertiser-tribune.com) , The Advertiser-Tribune

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When disasters occur, such as flooding from heavy rains in July, a Tiffin business often is called to assist with clean-up. That company is Quick Dry Inc., owned by Richard Zeis.

"We are a specialty structural drying company. Specifically, we're the ones that go in after a water line breaks in the house, and your basement gets flooded, and dry out the structure so we can save as much as possible in the house," Zeis said.

In early August, "Extreme Home Makeover" television show producers contacted Zeis to work on a home in northeast Columbus. It was his second such project, the first being done a few years ago in Toledo.

The 3-story house measured 4,000 square feet, which is far larger than the average home. For the makeover, Quick Dry was asked to volunteer time, materials and equipment to dry the new construction.

"To speed up the process so they can build that home in a week, we are there right after the drywall is hung so we can dry all the drywall mud and then dry the paint. Once the paint is dry, our job is done," Zeis said.

A Columbus company had been called for the job, but Zeis has two large mobile dryers that could accomplish the task in a smaller time frame. Fired by propane, the units pump dry air heated to more than 200 degrees into the house. The pressure of the desert air keeps humidity out of the interior and allows everything to dry quickly.

Only a few companies in the U.S. have the units because they are a large investment.

"Dehumidification's been around for 50 years, and that's typically how you dry things. You have to have a controlled environment to do dehumidification, and the process is somewhat slow. The unit that we have is a trailer-mounted drying unit," Zeis said.

Zeis uses a hygrometer to measure temperature and grains of water in the air. He and his crew have received training and certification as drying technicians. When the company purchased the dryer, the manufacturer trained employees in its operation, but crew members also have instruction on a national level that allows them to assist with disasters all over the U.S.

In Toledo, Zeis took his entire staff from Tiffin and had a few more helpers at the site for a total of 10 or 11.

In Columbus, he and his son, Nicholas, 31, drove down with their two units.

Employees from the other company had agreed to assist them, but the plans changed at the last minute.

"We had just come off of two weeks straight of drying out basements in Tiffin. So everybody was tired. They promised us all the help, but when we got there, there was only one other person. What should have taken 10 or 11 people we ended up doing with three people at this house," Zeis said.

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It turned out a customer had called out the other company during the night. They had worked through the night and couldn't help with the makeover. To make matters worse, the Zeises had to set up their equipment in pouring rain, creating more humidity to be removed. But they made the best of it.

"When we do get the call, we think we're doing a good thing, and it's really fun. It's grueling because we're usually on-site anywhere from 20-30 hours. You don't get to sleep, and it makes for a very long day," Zeis said.

The Columbus home has a flat roof to hold solar panels. The owner of the home is active with a youth center in the area, so the builders also installed solar panels on the youth center.

Zeis said the makeover crew usually tries to do one or two other projects to benefit the neighborhood.

"It's incredible what they can do in a 24-hour period," Zeis said. "Once the drywall is hung, we can go right in behind it. In a period of 24 hours, they are finishing the insulation in the home; they will have all the drywall hung on all three floors; they will have it taped and mudded, or finished; the primer on all the walls; the interior trim and kitchen all started; and the ceramic tile all done on all three floors."

At the same time, exterior work is going on outside the structure. Zeis said about 10,000 pieces of brick were placed on the outer walls while he was there. The family already is living in the Columbus home, but the program is not expected to be broadcast until December. The makeover crew dressed in accordance with the holiday.

"We always wear blue T-shirts for the show, but we were in red and green T-shirts, and they had the Columbus chapter of Santa Clauses there. There were probably 25 or 30 Santa Clauses on the set at a time. An area park in the neighborhood was completely decorated with Christmas decorations. Houses in the neighborhood were decorated - but no snow," Zeis said.

During the makeover, the neighborhood is cordoned off, but Zeis said people involved in the build have more access to the site than the media. Many neighbors let the builders camp out in their homes and offered parking spaces to the crew and volunteers.

Zeis said he and Nicholas should appear in television footage from the build.

"My son and I got filmed with the designer, Michael, as they were shooting about the dining room table that was made, a 12-foot long table to seat the 14 people in that household. ... We should be in that one," Zeis said.

"Extreme Makeover" is in its ninth season and can be seen Sunday nights on ABC-TV.

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