

ECU students part of 'Extreme' experience

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JAMESVILLE — They are giving up spring break for an experience that could only be described as extreme.

East Carolina University students are volunteering for ABC's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," building a home for a Jamesville family this week, the university's spring break. The house will be unveiled to the family on Friday.

Students in ECU's construction management program make up most of the university's volunteers. Seventy-five to 80 students from the department are volunteering at the site.

Six students in the program served as project team leaders. Construction management teaching instructor Bryan Wheeler and graduate West Overman are serving as project managers.

They are joining Edenton Builders and more than 1,000 volunteers from the region to work 12-hour shifts and 24-hour days building a home for the family of Jeff Cooper, a decorated and disabled Gulf War veteran.



"The most impressive part of this is the magnitude of it," said Jerry Langston, a senior ECU student in construction management. "It's not the fact that we're building a huge house. It's the fact that there is a coordinated effort of people who are volunteering their time and doing what should be a 16 to 24-week project in 106 hours or less."

Facing that time crunch, the army of volunteers is rarely resting. By Monday afternoon, they began securing the first walls of the new home on Cooper Lane. ECU students could be spotted in the crowd by the Pirate mascot stickers on their white hard hats.

Langston said he kept in mind the family they're helping.

"It's great to do this for a family that has the needs they have. We know at the end of the week, this family will come into a brand new house that is handicapped accessible," he said.

Jeff Cooper, his wife Clara, and their children Windy and Aaron faced many challenges in their old home. Both Jeff and his son are disabled. Jeff, who suffers from Gulf War Syndrome, immune disorders and multiple sclerosis, is confined to a wheelchair. Aaron lost most of his right arm when he was run over by a garbage truck two years ago.

The double-wide trailer where they had been living had faulty wiring, a sinking roof and a rotting wheelchair ramp, according to a news release from "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition."

The new home will be a tremendous improvement.

"This is truly about service. That's why we're here," Wheeler said.

The Jamesville episode of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" is scheduled to air on ABC in May.