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R.I.'s own *Makeover* airs tonight

An army of volunteers worked around the clock to replace a Warwick family's crowded house in one week.

BY BARBARA POLICHETTI
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

WARWICK — They were all crowded around the Christmas tree that had been squeezed into the living room of the Silva family's tiny ranch-style house on Yucatan Drive.

Fire officials. Police. Public works supervisors. The owner of a construc-

tion company. An architect. An executive from National Grid. City Hall employees. The mayor.

They were there to answer one key question from the producers of the popular, feel-good television show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.

The question: Could they guarantee that in less than one week they could

create a new home for Doreen and Ken Silva, their five kids and an ever-changing brood of foster children?

One by one they answered yes, Mayor Scott Avedisian recalled last week. And then they heard the words they'd been hoping for from one of the television show's executive producers.

"He said, 'Let's build this family a

SEE **HOUSE, A13**



Eric Johnson, of Oldport Homes, in Portsmouth, rates building the Silva house one of his best experiences.

Also, in *Lifebeat*, *Makeover* host Ty Pennington is an ADHD success story.

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL
BILL MURPHY

Doing with less

The Martins of Cranston are part of the middle-class squeeze



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / GRETCHEN ERTL

Stephanie, 6, shows her mom, Gloria Martin, the quarter she got when locking the grocery cart at PriceRite in Warwick. Paul Martin is at left.

BY LYNN ARDITI
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

CRANSTON

Gloria Martin stands over a hot frying pan, checking her watch as her 6-year-old daughter scours the refrigerator for snacks.

The voice of her other daughter floats in from the living room.

Is dinner ready, Mom?

In her old life, she'd avoid these rushed dinners, squeezed between work and sports activities, by eating out. But that's an indulgence her middle-class family can no longer afford.

Now, Gloria fills her Whole Foods tote with produce from the cut-rate grocer Price-Rite. She and her husband, Paul, canceled their family health club membership and instead work out with weights in their living

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Extra: The Martin family has cut back on groceries and in other areas to accommodate the rising cost of gasoline and other expenses. How are you getting by? To respond, and for an audio slideshow on how the Martins are making ends meet, go to **projo.com**

room.

The Martins' house no longer has digital cable TV or digital video recorder service. There is no more house cleaner. No more weekend trips to Maine. And no more shopping therapy.

"It's very hard to go cold turkey," says Gloria Martin. "It's like getting off drugs!"

The Martins limit eating out with their three children to just once a month. If their

15-year-old son, Kevin, gets an urge for a McDonald's double cheeseburger with fries, he has to pay for it — plus a \$1 gas surcharge if his parents are driving. Their 13-year-old daughter, Julie, stashes babysitting money in a sealed cardboard box to help pay for cheerleading at the Rhode Island Cheer Academy.

The Martins have moved their older children from parochial to public schools, and next fall Stephanie, 6, will also make the switch.

All of this has shaved hundreds of dollars each month off their household budget.

And still, they worry.

If their estimates are correct (and they should be, since they're both accountants), this year their household income may hit \$65,000 — about half of the roughly \$130,000 they earned in 2004. Their six-figure income plum-

SEE **MONEY, A15**

Troopers continue to profile, study says

Col. Brendan Dougherty discounts the accuracy and relevance of findings by URI professors that once again show a pattern of different treatment toward minorities in traffic stops and searches.

BY BRUCE LANDIS
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — A new study of the state police says troopers are stopping and searching cars driven by blacks and Hispanics more often than those driven by whites.

The study, commissioned by the former superintendent of the state police and conducted by faculty members at the University of Rhode Island, produced findings like those in two similar, statewide studies during the last seven years.

They say they found a pattern of "racial and/or ethnic differences" among motor vehicle stops and searches by the state police.

The results are consistent with what one would expect from biased law-enforcement tac-

SEE **PROFILE, A10**

U.S. missiles hit heart of Sadr City

At least 23 people are reported injured near a hospital; U.S. blames militants for using civilians as shields.

BY BRADLEY BROOKS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD — The U.S. military fired guided missiles into the heart of Baghdad's teeming Sadr City slum yesterday, leveling a building 55 yards away from a hospital and injuring nearly two dozen people.

Separately, the U.S. military said late yesterday that four Marines were killed on Thursday by a roadside bomb in Fallujah province. No other details were released and the names of the Marines were withheld pending notification of their families.

AP Television News footage from Sadr City showed several ambulances destroyed and on fire, thick black smoke rising from them as firefighters worked to put out the flames.

SEE **IRAQ, A6**

WEATHER
Dreary. Rain.
High 61.
Forecast, B8.

Democrats differ on economics

Hillary Clinton tends to focus on specific programs, while Barack Obama proposes broader changes.

BY DAVID LEONHARDT
THE NEW YORK TIMES

As they traveled across Indiana and North Carolina over the last few days, trading charges and countercharges about the wisdom of suspending the federal gas tax for the summer, Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama were really having a larger fight.

They were arguing over who had better economic instincts.

For all the similarities between the two Democrats, there is also a core thematic difference between them. Clinton tends to favor narrowly focused programs, such as

the gas-tax holiday, that speak to specific voter concerns. By suspending the tax and replacing it with a new tax on oil companies, Clinton told a rally in Hendersonville, N.C., on Friday, she was standing with "hard-pressed Americans who are trying to pay their gas bills."

Obama, on the other hand, leans toward broader programs meant to help nearly all middle- and low-income families. At a steel factory in Northwest Indiana on Friday, Obama called the tax holiday a "gimmick," and said he instead favored a cut in the payroll tax, which finances Social Security, of up to \$1,000 for middle-class households

"to offset the costs not only of gas, but also of food."

The dueling instincts do not explain all the differences between the two Democrats. They also disagree about a health-insurance mandate (Clinton favors one) and the capital-gains tax (Obama has indicated he would raise it more than Clinton would). Obama is open to increasing the amount of income subject to the Social Security payroll tax; Clinton has been critical of that idea.

But their contrasting approaches do extend to a range of issues, including the cur-

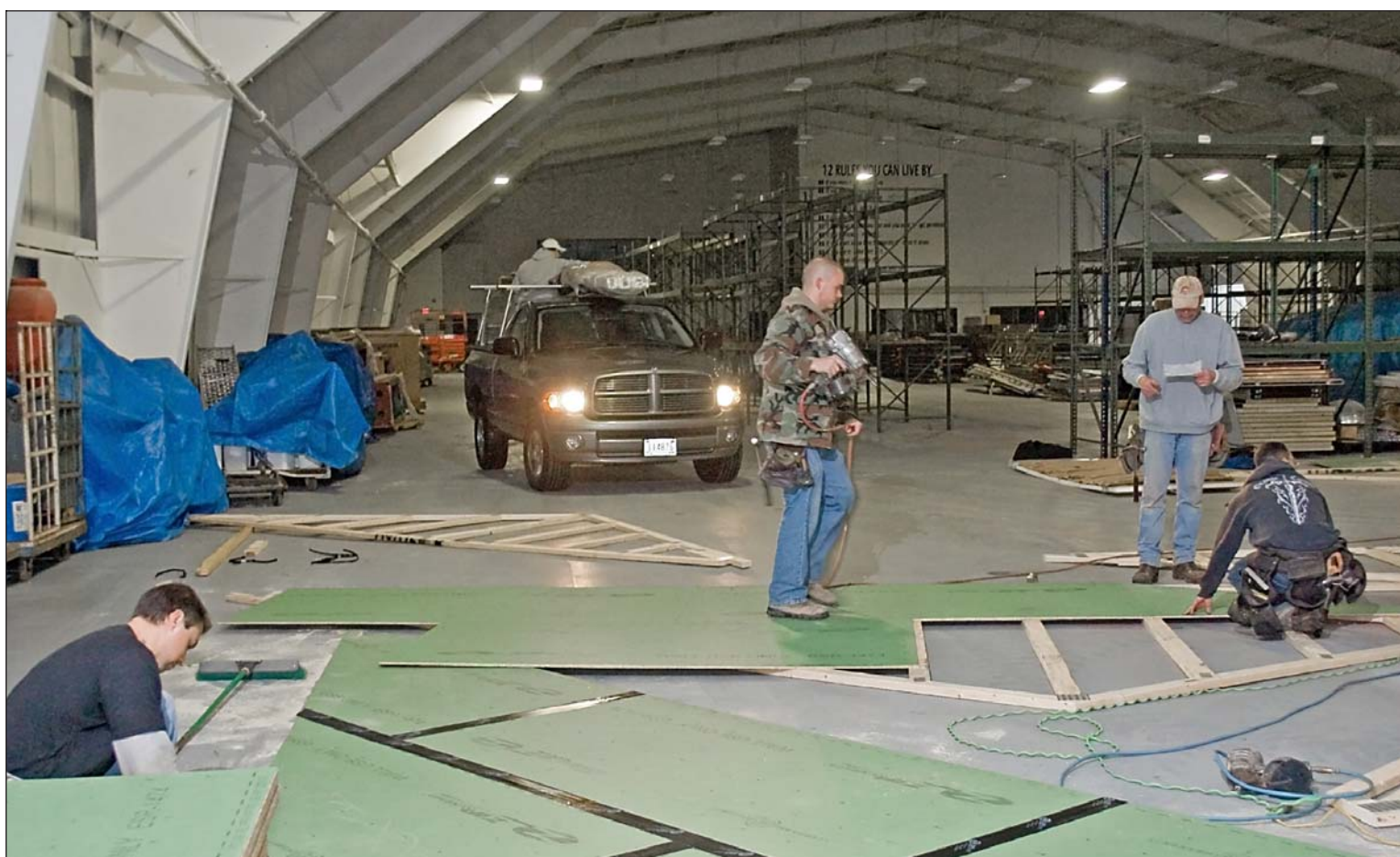
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COURTESY OF OLDPORT HOMES

Among the workers preparing parts of the house at a nearby warehouse formerly used as tennis courts are Lucas Bills, center, Tom Whitehead, standing right, and Alex Cieplex, kneeling right.

House

Continued from Page A1

house,' and people started to cry," Avedisian said. "It was very, very emotional.

"My answer was that the city was going to do whatever it could to make this happen because when else do we get to be involved in a project that changes people's lives in such a dramatic way?"

People will get to see the story tonight on ABC when the *Extreme Makeover* show chronicles the work of an army of volunteers who worked around the clock (and through one snowstorm) to replace the Silvas' overcrowded, lead-contaminated house with a new 3,000-square-foot house with ample space, sunlight and bathrooms.

The details of the interior of the gracious-looking home with tiered front lawn and pergola covering the backyard patio are a secret until tonight's broadcast. The rest of the tale has been very public since February, when *Extreme Makeover* took over the small neighborhood near Hoxsie Four Corners.

After the Silvas were whisked away on a mandatory trip to Disney World, hundreds of spectators lined up day and night to watch the family's old house be demolished and the new one feverishly constructed and topped off with finishing touches that included a backyard playhouse and early spring flowers.

Before Ty Pennington, the touselled star and lead interior designer of *Extreme Makeover*, roused the family from their home on the morning of Feb. 18, the Silvas lived far from the spotlight.

Ken, 35, drives a recycling collection truck for the city's Department of Public Works, and Doreen spends her days caring for and home-schooling the couple's five boys, who range in age from 3 to 14. The two oldest are their biological children; the younger ones were adopted after first living with the family as foster children.

All of the children have special needs, but the family focuses on celebrating each other's accomplishments as they share their passion for NASCAR racing, pro sports and just being together. Committed to helping as many children in need as they can, Ken and Doreen have cared for more than 16 foster children over the past six years, and they added two more since the house was completed.

They both said they rely a lot on their faith and their extended



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BILL MURPHY

The Silva family has settled in at their new home on Yucatan Drive in Warwick. Left to right: Matthew, 12, Ken, Kenny, 14, Doreen, Sammy, 3, Jayedin, 8 and Isaiah, 7.

family at the Warwick Assembly of God church. It was their fellow congregants that Ken and Doreen first turned to when they realized that it would take an extreme miracle to solve the problem of their cramped, contaminated house that was threatening the health of their children and their eligibility to continue foster parenting.

"They knew that they needed to be nominated, and we were all so enthusiastic about it," said Donna DeSantis, wife of church Pastor Stephen DeSantis and one of Doreen's best friends. "We had so many people who wrote letters of support once we put the word out," she said. "Kenny and Doreen are the kind of people who are always willing to help anytime something needs to be done for others."

According to the show's Web site, it is committed to improving the living situations of deserving families. It invites anyone to apply and fields countless requests, a process that entails poring over the "before" videos that are requested.

Although the show's producers picked them in December, all the Silvas knew until the February knock on the door was that they were finalists along with some other Rhode Island families. They believed that the pre-Christmas visit, which required them to leave the house for a couple of hours, was just part of the application process.

Eric Johnson, owner of Oldport Homes, in Portsmouth, had never heard of the Silvas or

watched *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* when he got a phone call last fall asking him whether he could build a custom house in a week — for free. He was a little skeptical, to say the least, but it didn't take long for him to wholeheartedly get on board.

When he first agreed to participate, the Silvas were still just finalists contending with other worthy Rhode Island families that needed a helping hand. Johnson said he was struck by his staff's enthusiasm for the show. And he was intrigued by the professional challenge.

He said he knew that participation in a prime-time series would result in national publicity, but the bigger attraction was to use his 29 years of building experience to help someone deserving. "My father was a missionary," Johnson said, recalling childhood years in Texas. "We used to go to Mexico to help build churches, and I hadn't done anything like that in a while and thought it would feel good."

Early on, he got Blount Bennett Architects Ltd., of East Providence, to contribute their skills, but that was only the beginning. In order to complete the challenge, Johnson would end up soliciting supplies and skills from hundreds of people. Cabinets, lumber, windows, roof shingles and every nail were donated. And the same was true for the labor — from the crane operators to the trim carpenters.

The builder and his team also had to figure out the best use of the thousands of people who showed up during the frenzied days in Warwick to offer their labor. "They say it's a week, but it's really less than that," Johnson said.

After the Silvas' joyous Monday morning wake-up call, Tuesday and Wednesday were

devoted to moving out their belongings and razing the old house.

Actual construction began mid-day Wednesday, and the house was mostly completed by Saturday although painting, other interior finishing work and the building of some custom furnishings continued up until the minute the Silvas walked to the front door on Monday, Feb. 25, while thousands of people cheered.

Most of the actual construction was done in about 98 hours, Johnson said, describing how coffee-fueled crews worked through the nights under the blaze of spotlights, communi-

ating with each other through wireless radios. Since this is not the norm for house building, Johnson said he took the show's advice and did his homework ahead of time by taking a reconnaissance trip to Nevada to watch another *Extreme Makeover* production.

"Once I saw that, I knew we could do it," said Johnson. "It all came down to scheduling." Scheduling with military precision, that is.

He credits Oldport vice president Jon Seibold with mapping out the minute-by-minute plan that started a couple of weeks ahead with the arrival of the raw materials. The builder said they were fortunate to find a cavernous warehouse that had once been indoor tennis courts nearby on Commerce Drive.

Lumber, windows, cabinet parts and more were stored there, he said. And they were able to frame the walls and flooring there so they could then be trucked to Yucatan Drive once the project kicked off. Johnson's low-key manner makes it all sound deceptively easy, but he says there was no margin for error.

If any of the materials did not arrive exactly as ordered, they would have been toast, he said, and through it all he slept only about three hours a night — bunking in a trailer parked down the street from the Silvas' home.

Johnson rates the experience as one of the best of his life. And he said he's not alone.

"It felt like a party, even when we were working in the middle of the night," he said. "You get to meet all kinds of new people and many became new friends."

"Every day we had more people showing up to volunteer than we could actually use. And they were all so happy if they got a chance to help."

"What says it all is that every time I went to thank someone, they ended up trying to thank us

for letting them take part."

One thing TV viewers won't see is just how difficult it was for everyone to keep the planned makeover a secret from the Silvas for nearly two months. The element of surprise is crucial to the show, and Avedisian said that the producers were very clear that any slip could jeopardize the whole project.

"That day around the Christmas tree right after they said they would build the house, I had to say, 'Listen it's only December and this isn't going to happen till February and we can't ruin this for these people,'" Avedisian recalled. "I asked everyone to swear to me as mayor that they wouldn't tell anyone — not even their spouses."

"It was pretty difficult and pretty dramatic," he said, describing how some employees started avoiding Silva because they didn't want to say anything by accident. "Kenny must have thought we were all getting pretty rude," Avedisian said.

"I remember the day the Silvas pulled up to their new house. There were all these people standing around wiping their eyes and saying it must be allergies even though it was February," Avedisian said. "What this project did for our city is not only show us how we can come together to do something good for someone. It also helped us believe in ourselves as a community."

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COURTESY OF OLDPORT HOMES

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