

## Waleska family chosen for 'Extreme' home dream

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With a simple knock on the door, the lives of a Waleska family, whose last two years have been filled with turmoil, were changed.

The morning of Jan. 11, Faith Tipton-Smith and her daughters, Missy, 16, and Emily, 8, heard the host of ABC's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," Ty Pennington, scream "Good Morning Tipton-Smith family!"

That was when they found out they had been selected from thousands of applicants to receive a home makeover.

The multiple award winning show, which airs Sunday nights on ABC, compresses a week-long community effort into a one-hour, or sometimes 2-hour, program showing a design team, builders, contractors and volunteers who team up to create a spectacular home built for the family's needs.

The Tipton-Smith's story is what won the hearts of ABC and Oakwood Homes' owners Tony Perry and Patti Bachtel.

"We feel honored to have been chosen (as the builder)," Perry said, adding he couldn't do it without his building partners. "It's another opportunity to do a really good thing in an unusually big way. It's really exciting."

During the build, the family is vacationing in California.

"They needed something after what's happened in their lives," said Waleska Mayor Marguerite Cline. "I'm so glad they're... in Southern California, and they're probably so excited they can hardly stand it."

Perry fought back tears as he told the family's story during the official announcement.

On Feb. 5, 2005, the family's Lake Arrowhead home burned to the ground. Even after the investigation, fire officials couldn't determine what caused the treacherous fire, said Tim Cavender, director of Cherokee County Fire and Emergency Services.

After the family coped with the loss of their home and everything inside, they opted to build their dream home, which was chosen by Tipton-Smith, her eldest child, Ransom, and her two daughters.

Three months into the build, tragedy struck the family yet again.

Around 7 p.m. May 3, 2005, Ransom was driving his Honda on Little Refuge Road near the entrance to his neighborhood, reports showed. Ransom, 16, crossed the centerline crashing head-on into a large pickup truck, the police report said.

Ransom's friend, Alex Yurewich, 16, also died in the crash, and his younger sister, Missy, suffered injuries, reports show.

Compounding medical bills forced the family to end the construction, which left the framed home that sits off a curvy Lake Arrowhead road exposed to the elements. A hazardous mold problem developed, and that's how the home stayed until last week.

The family had been living in a rental property in Waleska.

"They all four handpicked the plan but Ransom had aspirations of being an architect," said Nancy Monroe, spokesperson for Oakwood Homes. "His input was something very important to the family. They wanted the home their family picked out."

Perry said they want to give the family the home they want and deserve.

"We're going to complete what they started," Perry said, adding they are building the family an EarthCraft home, which will help with energy conservation.

Not only is the television show the local builder and the building partners teaming up to help the family, but RBC Centura Bank has already pledged \$25,000 to pay off the family's \$145,000 mortgage. The financial institution has also set up a fund so the community can donate toward paying off the family's mortgage.

"We're just thrilled and honored to be involved in a project like this," said Tom Riley, RBC Centura Bank Georgia state president. "It is our challenge and our duty to raise through donations through our branches... the additional money to pay off the family's mortgage."

In addition to the home and the fundraising effort, Reinhardt College has offered both daughters scholarships to attend the college after they graduate high school. In today's dollars, the scholarships are worth \$111,600, said Marsha White, spokesperson for Reinhardt College.

"We at Reinhardt are excited to have the opportunity to offer scholarships to Missy and Emily," said Dr. J. Thomas Isherwood, Reinhardt's president. "We value our close ties with the local community and are glad to be asked to be a part of the 'Extreme Makeover: Home Edition' experience."

Reinhardt is about 15 minutes from the family's home and e-mails have been circulating the campus challenging faculty, staff, students, alumni and trustees to contribute to the cause.

"A bunch of my friends and I



PHOTOS BY ERIKA NELDNER | LEDGER-NEWS

**ABOVE:** The Tipton-Smith family's home was overgrown with hazardous mold, which Oakwood Homes, their partners and ABC's Extreme Makeover: Home Edition will fix and give the family a place they can relax and feel safe.



**LEFT:** ABC Extreme Makeover: Home Edition's design team will work against the clock to design a perfect home for the Tipton-Smith family. On Day 1, designer Michael Moloney was already perusing paint swatches and stone samples for the family's home.

are making plans to help out," said Reinhardt senior Cassie Chastain. "It'll be fun and it'll be great to help make a difference."

To donate to the mortgage fund, to volunteer or to get daily up-

dates go to [www.extremeoakwood.com](http://www.extremeoakwood.com). Volunteers must have releases filled out that have to be taken to the check-in tent.

The show is tentatively set to air Sunday, March 4 on ABC.