

A need, a dream, and now a house

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A house is not a home until there's someone living in it, but John King's dream wasn't a house until there was a roof over it.

Now that there is one, the Sarasota home builder is hoping that his project -- to build a specially designed home for **Paul Salter** and his family with donated materials, labor and services -- will move along quickly now. King, owner of Rampart Homes, acknowledges the pace of construction has not been as swift as he hoped it would be when ground was broken in September. It was a concrete shell for a bit too long.

"There have been twists and turns in the road," he told a dinner meeting of the Home Builders Associations of Sarasota and Manatee Counties on Thursday night. But last Saturday, crews lowered the roof trusses on top of the house -- a milestone in the project that will give **Paul Salter** a sense of freedom that he sorely lacks in the small home his family now inhabits.

Paul was left without the use of his arms or legs after his neck was broken during a youth football practice in 1999. Now a high school freshman, he was there to watch Saturday until the work was done.

"When we set the trusses," King told me, "he was there the entire day. It didn't go very quickly, and it was a little cold and windy, but he insisted he stay there until the last truss was set."

Paul's upbeat attitude has impressed a lot of people, and it drives King to get the house built. "One of things I'm inspired by with **Paul** is that he asks a lot of great questions about building," said King, a remodeling contractor who envisioned the project when he was asked to put an addition onto the **Salters'** old home on Camphor Avenue. He found it unsuitable for remodeling.

"He wants to know what the difference is in the different types of plywood, what's going on with the trusses, why we have the straps, what's going on with the concrete, the tie beams, what they cost.

"He's a genuine kid. He's got a bit of a wit, a little bit of sarcasm. He's feisty. I think the most amazing thing about him is if you get caught up in the conversation, you lose track that he's disabled. He has given me no indication, at any time I've been with him, that he's disabled verbally or in his attitude. His spirit is up, and that is what energizes me and motivates me."

King has needed that motivation, because although many people in the local home-building industry have promised to help, in some cases those promises have been easier to make than to keep.

"A lot of it is, people promise us this stuff, and I know they are coming from a good place at

the time that they sign up," said King, touching his heart. "But it gets down to the nitty-gritty and either they're busy or there's something that comes up.

"I had three framing crews lined up to help. I had talked to them almost to the day that they were supposed to be there. One guy falls off the face of the Earth and I can't find him for anything. Another guy has a personal problem and absolutely can't get there.

"The last guy," said King, incredulous, "has an accident in his car the day before he is to start. So it ended up being one guy on the job."

It's a sign of the times in the building industry. While U.S. home starts last year tailed off from the record-breaking 1999, construction remained white-hot in the Sarasota area. And it was restricted by a labor shortage. King, who is donating his time and expertise as well, knows what it's like to give until it hurts.

"It's tough," King said. "Some of these folks, especially some of these framers, aren't all that well off. So this is time they're giving up when they could be with their families, or at a job somewhere else. They're making their living, they've got their own families."

Progress report

With the plywood sheeting on the roof and the windows delivered Friday from PGT Industries, King is ready to start on interior framing, plumbing and electrical work.

"Our big needs now are drywall, landscaping, furniture," said King, who this week accepted a plaque on behalf of the Sarasota HBA from the Suncoast Center for Independent Living in recognition of the **Salter** effort. "I have a dream about possibly a pool, which would be tremendous for **Paul** because he is pretty much in the wheelchair all the time. His nurse could hold him, and it would be great.

"And I would like a really nice front door, and automatic door openers."

The 2,100-square-foot house will be a tremendous boost for **Paul**, his parents, Glenn and Gail, and his siblings, Dixie and Jason.

"When you look at where they're at now, those are cramped quarters. His life is pretty much in his chair, and for him to be able to get around and have that space in his home ... that's his domain, that's where he's at.

"Psychologically, you keep anybody in a confined area and it gets old. Not being able to move around literally in a 10- by 15-foot room, that's pretty darn tough. By the time you get furniture in there, that's not a lot of space. I'd like to be able to create an environment not only inside his home, but outside his home, so that he has a place to be safe."

King said **Paul's** attitude "is super. He's doing great. The whole family ... I think the house gives them a feeling of hope, so there's not all this despair in their lives. I felt bad that it wasn't moving faster. I wish I had a whole bunch of personal money so I could just call up and hire people to do it."

King hopes to have house done by next Christmas. "I will do everything I can to make that happen, but I am at the mercy of donors and suppliers and workers."

Industry donors

Among those who have "come to the table," said King, are these industry donors:

Abbotts' Back-Hoe Service; Al Harris Pest Control; Alvin Sommers Masonry; Action Signs; B.O.S.S. Portable Toilets; C&M Road Builders; Cox Lumber; Custom Air Heating & Air Conditioning; Daniel Muffley Construction; Danny Baker Trucking; Environmental Designs Unlimited; FPL; Fastening Systems; Florida Blueprint of Sarasota.

Also, Gulf Coast Masonry; Gulf to Bay Plumbing; JL Concrete Design; JJ Crane Service; Kimley-Horn & Associates; Leads Lunber; Lee Wetherington Homes; Millstone Form and Pour; Michael Saunders & Company; Peter Glunk Construction; PGT Industries; Paragon Electric Service; PSI engineering; Reed W. Mapes Inc.; Sampey & Burchett Inc., Surveyors; Singletary Concrete Products; Sarasota Pre-Cast Products; Stark Truss; Southdown Inc.; Scotty's Lumber; Sarasota Bank; Taylor Woodrow Communities; Whetstone Engineering & Testing.

How to help

If you'd like to donate money, materials or labor for the **Paul Salter** house, contact John King at Rampart Homes, (941) 925-4835. Checks, payable to Sarasota Bank, **Paul Salter** Construction Escrow Account, may be mailed to the bank at 2 N. Tamiami Trail, Suite 100, Sarasota, FL 34236.

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