

Family overcome seeing 'Extreme' home

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BRIDGEPORT — Gloria Brown and her family left a burnt and ravaged home at 285 Hollister Ave. last Wednesday.

But a week later, they came back to a larger, blue home with a white picket fence surrounded by flowers. Plaques on two stone pillars flanking the driveway read "The Brown Family" and 285 Hollister Ave. The front porch light was on.

Ending a week of tight security in the East End area surrounding her home, Brown and her children, sisters Bobbi, 17, and Jana'e, 14, and their brother, Fred, 16, exited a black limousine to see the house that television and local volunteers built in one week on the ABC show "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition."

Brown raised her hands and her two daughters fell to ground after laying eyes on the Victorian structure standing where a burnt, flooded and vandalized wreck used to be.

Fred did back flips in the street.

They also shared a group hug with the host, Ty Pennington, to the cheers of the approximately 4,000 spectators who lined both sides of the street.

Show officials did not make the Browns available for comment Wednesday night.

But city Mayoral Aide Deborah Caviness, who attended with Mayor John M. Fabrizi and Michael Feeney, the city's chief administrative officer, is a friend of Brown, who is the associate minister of the English Chapel Cathedral of Miracles Church.

"Couldn't have happened to a more deserving person," Caviness said. "Gloria Brown is a longtime community leader who puts everyone else's needs

before her own."

Members of the church also gathered to wish their associate minister well.

"We love you Browns, from the English Chapel," they shouted.

The volunteers and other workers toiled through high heat and humidity to complete the home, **designed by Danbury architect Leigh D. Overland** and built by Gulick Associates, of New Canaan, with materials from Seymour-based Haynes Materials.

Overland, who attended the unveiling, explained his design.

"A family's home should not be just a house. It should be a framework for a wonderful life," he said.

"A house should make you feel comfortable when you walk through the front door. It should be a safe haven, where it feels good, where you can relax, where the world is OK," he added.

Overland designed the house around the family, after viewing the video they submitted in the application for the show. The show chooses all of the companies to build the houses.

"I could tell the family was a very close family," he said. "I wanted to create spaces that would let them share things."

Gloria Brown "has her own contemplation area" because she is a minister, he said.

It's several thousand square feet, larger than the old house, but not overly large, Overland added.

"I wanted this to fit in with the neighborhood," he said. "This fits in with the neighborhood. It's an asset to the community."

The home's speedy construction required some innovations, said Tom Haynes, company president at Haynes Materials.

"We supplied everything, from a special foundation all the way up to the landscaping products," he said.

He was particularly proud of a quick-drying concrete his company made that would harden within 12 hours, rather than in a week.

"This foundation needed to be done in nine to 10 hours," he said.

They poured at 10:30 p.m. late last week after razing the damaged structure.

"Within 10 hours that foundation was ready," he added.

Such a house would normally take three to four months to build, he noted.

The family was slated to receive the keys and move in Wednesday night. The home is already furnished and decorated by the show's design team based on the family's suggestions.

But getting in took some time because the family shook hands with and hugged the volunteers and the show's other stars, including Paige Hemmis, Eduardo Xol, John Carr and Michael Moloney.

The episode is slated to air in October, Gulick officials said.

The show has garnered five awards, including two Emmys, and eight nominations, since it started in 2003.