



East Central Energy

Great service – guaranteed

East Central Energy plays a part in “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” episode

BRAHAM, MN--Fans of “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” have watched the whirlwind unleashed on their TV screen when Ty Pennington and crew show up to change the lives of a deserving family.

During a bustling week in early August, East Central Energy (ECE) was in the thick of the action. Staff learned around July 22 that a family in ECE’s service territory had been chosen to receive a new home. ECE employees met on July 24 with the contractor, Builders Commonwealth, Inc., to discuss electrical needs during the building project and to plan for the home’s heating and cooling systems. The exact location and the family’s name were not disclosed until August 3, when the show’s bus rolled into the Howard (Howie) and Jessica Huber yard in South Range, WI.

Energy efficiency and sustainability were paramount in designing the 2,300 sq. ft. home, and according to Energy Services Manager Greg Kvasnicka, ECE’s energy management programs were a perfect fit.

An electric boiler heats the tubing in the slab floor of the home. With a gas boiler for backup, the family is on ECE’s Dual Fuel program. They are also on the Storage Water Heating program and receive a combination rate for the two programs of 4.5 cents per kWh. Their 105-gallon Marathon water heater will meet the family’s hot water needs efficiently and economically. In addition, two ductless mini-split air source heat pumps will cool the house and provide heat in the spring and fall, until temperatures drop below 25 degrees. That system is also on a special ECE rate. All of the home’s appliances are ENERGY STAR® rated.

During the building project, ECE crews constructed a new underground line to provide electricity to the house and outbuildings, working closely with the project leader and electricians in order to be on site when needed. According to Operations Manager Lisa Prachar, flexibility was the key to completing the job in an economical manner while meeting the required timeframe.

The commotion was beginning to subside when Kvasnicka visited the Hubers to explain the benefits of their new electric heating and cooling systems.

“What a huge improvement in our lives,” said Howie. “We wanted to get on Dual Fuel at the old house, but we would have needed significant costly upgrades. This is so clean.”

As for the mini-split air source heat pumps, he said, “We’d never even seen the technology before. It was totally out of our reach.”

An Energy Ball® wind turbine in the Huber's yard lends another green component to their new home. Although the unit is not sized to meet all of the household energy needs, it will help offset some of the energy use.

Howie and Jessica thought they were off to a good start with a house and jobs in Two Harbors, MN when Howie was suddenly laid off. They were struggling financially, but Jessica, a nursing student, encouraged Howie to pursue his dream of becoming a firefighter. He realized his dream four years ago when he was hired by the Superior Fire Department. Thinking they'd overcome the worst of their financial struggles, they bought a dilapidated farmhouse in Douglas County, WI, south of Superior.

The couple would put their children, Henry and Rosie, to bed and work together into the wee hours of the morning to turn the old house into a warm, cozy haven. Years of work and many precious dollars later, the house proved to be beyond repair.

"We'd spend hours taping, plastering and sanding, and a few days later, you'd see giant cracks running through the new sheetrock," Jessica said. "We remodeled the bathroom, it rained and the roof leaked. Everything we did was ruined. Last winter, something happened to the septic. There was raw sewage spilling into the yard. That was on the same side of the house where the chimney fell down."

When "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" sent a letter to emergency response agencies in the Twin Ports looking for a "hometown hero" in need, Jessica took a chance and applied. They were called and visited by staff from the show, but didn't know they were chosen until August 3.

"It's still surreal," said Jessica as she stood in her new kitchen nearly two weeks after a swarm of workers descended on her property and left her with a new home. "I don't know exactly why this happened in our life, but we plan to keep paying it forward.... This was such a community effort.... It took the power of people to make this happen."

"We are very happy for the Huber family," said ECE President/CEO Garry Bye, "and very proud to have been part of the community effort that made their new home possible. Working together to get things done, improving the quality of life in our communities, that's the crux of our mission as a cooperative. This project certainly fit those ideals and made a life-changing difference for a hard working young couple."

ABC's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" featuring the Huber family aired on September 27, 2009.



ECE crews working at the site.



Howie and Jessica Huber and their children, Henry and Rosie in front of their new home.