

## EXTREME VOLUNTEERS

By Jane Seiberling

What did you dream about when you were becoming a massage therapist? Did you imagine a day when your new profession would have you rubbing elbows with famous people? And if you did, did you ever think that when it happened, you'd be giving your skills for free?

Well, that's what happened for AMTA Professional member Kristen Sykora. Sykora, a graduate of the Swedish Institute in New York City, is a licensed massage therapist practicing in New York. One day in March she was talking with Alure Home Improvements, an award-winning local remodeling firm she had contracted to work on her house. While they spoke, Alure told her some surprising news that gave her a great idea.

### A Great Idea

Alure had agreed to be the crew for an episode of the hit ABC television series, "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." It would be Alure's fourth time working for the show. Their task was to tear down and rebuild a three-story home in less than five days.

Because everyone on the crew of the show is a volunteer, donating their labor to help a family in need, Sykora thought it would be a nice addition to have a team of volunteer massage therapists to work on the crew during their breaks.

### Working the Telephone

Alure loved the idea, and Sykora sprang into action. She sent e-mails to the Swedish Institute alumni site and her AMTA chapter, telling her colleagues that "It is an exciting opportunity, as we may get to promote massage to those who labor physically every day for a living, as well as volunteer for a great cause!"

Getting people to commit had its challenges; for one thing, Sykora couldn't tell them the location until 48 hours before the job would start. But through plenty of hard work on the telephone lines, Sykora put together a crew of 23 massage therapists. Early on the morning of Tuesday, March 28, she was able to call all the therapists who had signed on and tell them to go to the home of the Peter family in Jamaica, Queens, NY.

### Volunteers On Site



Left to right: Maria Matera, LMT; Kristen Sykora, LMT and organizer; Sal Ferro, president, Alure; Deirdre McDonough, LMT; Carl Hyman, chairman, Alure.



Volunteer therapists Maria Matera and Deirdre McDonough provide massage to crew members at the Jamaica, Queens site.

The volunteer therapists worked for five days in two- to seven-hour shifts, from 6 a.m. until 12 a.m. “We could only have teams of three to five therapists working in a shift, because they didn’t want to lose too many workers from the site at one time,” recalls Sykora. Some therapists worked only a few shifts, while others stayed for many hours and until 2 or 3 in the morning because, says Sykora, “the need was so great, and we were having such a good time!”



Celebrity guest Fabio sweeps volunteer therapist Mary Duggan off her feet.

the Alure tent to watch it all,” says Sykora.

It was a wonderful experience for all who participated. “There was such a need for our services,” says Sykora. “The workers were all so grateful. One man told me he felt like he’d gotten hours of sleep after only a 15-minute massage!”

The worksite was very secure; the entire street was blocked off, and all the therapists had to report to a warehouse near the site to sign in. Once signed in, they were issued official T-shirts that gave them freedom to move around the site. They all provided their own massage chairs and tables, face covers, disinfectant and so forth.

“There were some services in tents,” says Sykora, “but we were set up on the sidewalk next to the Alure tent. We were lucky because the weather was beautiful—it rained only one day for about an hour. There were also usually a few massage therapists working in the warehouse too.”

All massages were done over clothing and lasted 5 to 15 minutes. Chair and table massages were provided to all members of the crew, including workers from Alure, ABC staff, caterers and other volunteers.

The volunteer therapists didn’t, however, get to work on the show’s hosts. Reports Sykora, “ABC wanted us to give massage on the bus on Monday, but we didn’t know they would still be filming that day.” Only two therapists were able to return Monday, and with all the activity of filming they were able to give only a few massages to the crew.

Still, Sykora did get to see the big reveal to the Peter family the day before, on Sunday. “I was invited to

The experience left her eager to help out again. "I've already been contacted for another episode being filmed in April," says Sykora, "and I'm trying to get some of the same people to work with me again."

*The television episode of the Peter family's home makeover is scheduled to air on May 7, 2006, on ABC.*

*Sykora succeeded in organizing a second crew to help with the makeover of the Arena family's home in Purdys, NY. That episode will air on May 14, 2006. You can read more about that experience in the June edition of e-touch.*

*To learn more about Alure and its relationship with "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," go to the Alure home page at [www.alure.com](http://www.alure.com).*

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