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# HOME HEROES

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# EXTREME HEROES

## National reality show rebuilds burned-out home for Jamaica family of nine

BY CRISTINA SANTUCCI

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When Romesh Peter, 18, first saw the “Extreme Makeover” home that now stood where his dilapidated and fire-ravaged house had sat a week before, he fell to his knees and kissed the ground. Behind him, the rest of his nine-person family stood in shock, until the realization set in that the house in front of them was now theirs.

“Thank you,” they yelled, some with tears of joy, others jumping in the air.

Volunteers, neighbors and crew who had hand-demolished and reconstructed the home in just five days cheered wildly as the Emmy-award-winning show’s designers trooped out of the three-story house, thanking volunteers for their hard work.

Volunteers including Lancer Josefa, 20, from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, hauled debris, laid bricks, and shoveled concrete, while the professional workmen handled all of the serious construction.

While the Peter family enjoyed an all-expense-paid trip to Disneyland, ABC and Alure Home Improvement built a 3,300-square-foot home with six bedrooms and four bathrooms to replace the residence, which had been heavily damaged by fire in 2004.

The old house had only one “working” bathroom, which had no running water, no hot water in the entire house, and no heat other than propane for cooking. Plastic



THE QUEENS COURIER/Photos by Christina Santucci  
The crew from the TV show “Extreme Makeover” and Alure Home Improvement rebuilt the Peter family’s fire-damaged house in Jamaica. Romesh Peter, 18, kissed the ground when he and the rest of the family were shown the new house.

strips had haphazardly covered the windows, and the interior was marred by charred wood and dangling electrical wires. The family members slept on mattresses laid out on the floor.

“This was a family that was truly let down by the insurance system. They came to this country for a better life and it all went up in flames,” said Sal Ferro, president of Allure.

Six months after the fire destroyed the Peter’s residence;

their insurance carrier had dropped them from coverage and forced the family to move back into the unrepaired house. They sent in a video of their living conditions to ABC, one of 10,000 to 15,000 applications sent in every week, and won over the hearts of the network producers.

After emigrating from Guyana in 1996, the Peter family sent for their three children in 2000. After giving birth to their daughter Asthley, who has very bad

asthma, in 2000, they took in their niece and nephew, and an 18-year-old local boy.

Winston Peter, the father, fell into a deep depression after the house burned down, and with whatever money they could scrape together, the family painted and put down rugs to make the house more comfortable.

“They deserve it,” said neighbor Selema Remall, who has lived in the house next door to the Peters for 20 years. Remall

sat fixed on her front stoop as the crews worked on the house until the final minutes on Sunday afternoon before the unveiling. Remall said that the Peters are deeply spiritual, holding Hindu services in the back of their former home, but she hoped that the renovations would include some tribute to their religion.

“When they are done, they can do my house next,” Remall joked.

## Queens Courier reader wins \$1000 WEB Contest

BY ZACHARY BRAZILLER

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When Teresa Bubnik of Bayside won *The Queens Courier’s* \$1,000 Grand Prize website contest, it was the first time the Ecuadorian-born purchasing agent at Queens College had ever won any kind of contest. But instead of celebrating, she was skeptical.

“I never won anything before,” she said, “so I thought it was a delayed April Fools joke.”

This was no joke, however,

as Bubnik, 52, was recently awarded her check. She said she would spend half the money on her family’s new water heater and the rest on an upcoming trip to Albuquerque, NM for a reunion with old friends.

A valued reader of *The Queens Courier*, Bubnik, a proud mother of three, entered the contest online because “it was a cute thing. I suppose I never won anything, so I just tried it. ... Like they say, you have to be in it to win it,” she joked. “I guess *The [Queens] Courier* is my favorite paper now. I’ll make

sure to read it every week. I like that it’s online now.”

Bubnik says she picks up *The Queens Courier* at local newsstands and banks every week because “it usually has good news about Bayside, Queens and our churches and schools.”

Edna Greene from Jamaica Estates won the runner-up prize for a \$100 dining gift certificate.

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THE QUEENS COURIER/Photo by Christina Santucci  
Teresa Bubnik, middle, with her daughter, Michelle, 19, and son, Robert K, 14, shows off her \$1,000 check after winning the Grand Prize in *The Queens Courier’s* Website Contest.