



WTCA Member Capitalizes on Extreme Experience to Convert Builder to Wall Panels

by Emmy Thorson-Hanson

In March, one component manufacturer was given a chance to educate one builder in its region on the benefits of wall panels. WTCA member Northeast Panel & Truss, LLC of Kingston, NY took this golden opportunity and ran with it.

By supplying components for this special project, not only was NE Panel & Truss doing something good for the community, but for the wall panel industry as well. The build helped skeptics in the area dispel misconceptions about wall panels and embrace the product. What's more, the builder had such a great experience that they plan to start using wall panels! **SBC** caught up with NE Panel & Truss and the builder to get the inside scoop on what

contributed to the unique outcome of this project.

The Project

For the two-hour season finale of ABC's hit TV series *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* the show went to New York to help a family in need of a new home. The build took place in Colonie, NY with NE Panel & Truss supplying roof and floor trusses and wall panels for the project. Amedore Homes, a long-time customer of NE Panel & Truss (NEPT), was the builder for the project.

Supplying the components for an *Extreme* build is demanding enough, but NEPT had even more pressure to have a flawless performance thanks to a unique circumstance. Roof and floor truss designer John Workstus explained, "We've been working with Amedore Homes for about three years. We've done roof and floor trusses for them before, but they had never used wall panels, so this was their first time they got to see wall panels in use."

Jacob Masker designed the wall panels and knew the heat was on. "There was more pressure in getting things done perfectly because I knew there would be dozens of framers on site looking at the product and assessing it," he said. NEPT realized how much weight Amedore's first wall panel experience would hold and understood that it had to be an exceptional one.

George Amedore Jr., Executive Vice President of Amedore Homes, explained why his company had never used wall panels. "Prior to the *Extreme* build we had tossed around the idea of using wall panels, but the feasibility in changing our whole product line to wall panels didn't seem realistic," he explained. "At that time we couldn't find the savings or the financial benefit in it." George said his decision not to use wall panels in the past was simply a by-product of tradition: "Since framers in our area are quite accustomed to stick-framed walls, it would take them longer to do, which in turn would cost us more."

As a production homebuilder putting up between 100 and 140 homes per year, George said he knew from experience that trusses are very beneficial for every project in terms of cost. "As for wall panels," he said, "I figured that they were a good method of speeding up construction, but as far as the cost savings of the home, I wasn't convinced."

This illustrates an important fact for component manufacturers to keep in mind when discussing the use of wall panels with their builders. Just because a customer doesn't see how they can realize bottom line savings from implementing wall panels doesn't mean they aren't interested in the product. This can affect how you approach the discussion with your builder; an understanding and appreciation of the product is half the battle.

As was the case with NEPT, an actual demonstration of the benefits of using wall panels is often the best way to convert a customer. The three major benefits that Amedore Homes witnessed during the *Extreme* project were the time-saving element of wall panels, the environmental advantage of less waste, and the ease and the ability to do more on the front end.

Wall Panels Save Time

Luckily Amedore didn't need a whole lot of convincing that this unique project would require wall panels. "They realized right from the get-go that they would need panels. Originally they planned to use panels just for the exterior walls," said John. "But then they went to the site of an *Extreme* build in Philadelphia to get a feel for scheduling and such. They realized that the only way they would get it done was to do the whole house using panels."

Framing the house as quickly as possible was the best solution to getting the project completed on time, George said. Jacob agreed that was the right decision: "[Framing] would have taken at least twice the time, not to mention all the set-up. It wouldn't have been possible to finish the framing in the time allotted without the use of wall panels."

Months after the home was built, George continues to marvel at the speed of the build. "[*Extreme*] was a unique project; we had 80 framing contractors on the job. It took us 12 hours to frame the house, and it couldn't have been done without using wall panels, roof trusses and floor trusses. The quickest

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The use of wall panels in this project served more than one purpose.

at a glance

- ❑ The *Extreme* build helped Northeast Panel & Truss dispel misconceptions about wall panels and led their builder customer to embrace the product.
- ❑ The experience convinced Amedore Homes that wall panels are quality products that are also efficient and economical.
- ❑ The project couldn't have been completed in the given timeframe without the use of wall panels, roof truss and floor trusses.

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Extreme Experience...

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I have ever completed a home using conventional methods to stick-frame a house was 54 days."

Less Waste Is an Advantage

Another advantage to using wall panels that George had previously been unaware of was the benefit to the environment. "The waste and scraps from stick framing is a huge issue, and I had never considered the cost savings of waste from using wall panels," he said. "When I conventionally stick frame a home the dumpster is full of waste material, but when you use wall panels you have none."

Prior to this project, George had only taken the obvious financial "pros and cons" of wall panels into consideration, as many builders tend to do. But now things have changed because he witnessed firsthand the minimal waste produced when using components: "Now I have to factor that in. Being environmentally friendly is just another benefit to using wall panels."

Easy as 1-2-3

The last major benefit that stands out in George's mind is how other processes were improved thanks to the use of components. "It afforded us to do some pre-roughing of mechanicals when building the home," he said. "It was the first time I've ever used a pre-cast wall foundation and wall panel framing."

Because Amedore was still a little hesitant to use wall panels, extra communication was necessary during the design process. "It was a trade off," said Jacob. "We had a continuous communication line with the contractor; there was a lot of back and forth in order to get everything done ahead of time."

Going the Distance

Thanks to all of the work done ahead of time, when the day of the build came, everything came together seamlessly. "I walked away amazed with how smoothly the whole project went together," said John. "It was due to all the up-front preparation." In the two weeks prior to the build, NEPT had numerous face-to-face meetings with all of the trades (plumbing, heating, etc.) to get even the tiniest details on paper. Because every aspect of framing the home was componentized, it allowed them to save precious minutes for everyone else down the line. They added extra duct chases, brought extra floor trusses and put extra blocking in the roof trusses. This allowed the HVAC volunteers to lay the ducts on top of the bottom chords. NEPT was even able to help expedite the electricians' work by drilling the studs in the panels for electrical wire.

Not leaving anything to chance, NEPT even came to the jobsite prepared for any product damage that may have occurred during shipping or on the build site. This included



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Fortunately Amedore was open to learning and embraced the experience. "We pre-educated [the framers] ahead of time. We took all of our managing directors of each crew and went through the plans over and over," noted George. "We worked hand in hand with NEPT to come up with a whole timeline, what needed to be done on site and how it should be done." This level of organization and the use of wall panels allowed the NEPT team to pre-frame labor intensive elements ahead of time.

a laptop with all of the standard repair details, a portable press and a stock of extra connector plates. They also brought extra hangers (one or more of each style used). "Everything was coordinated so there were no structural interferences when it came time to build," John said. NEPT went the extra mile to ensure that Amedore's first experience with wall panels was memorable and positive.

Leaving a Good Impression

The impact of this build will last long past the date the episode airs. Thanks to NEPT, the framers who were on site witnessed the benefits of using wall panels. John got positive feedback from the folks at Amedore. "They were really impressed by the ease, speed and quality of the wall panels. The volunteer framers on this project hadn't used wall panels either, and were quite skeptical going into it. If something didn't fit during the framing their back-up plan was to stick frame that panel," he said. They never had to resort to the back-up plan.

According to George, "It was a great experience." He continued, "It was amazing to see the quality control that went into each panel. I had my very best framing contractors on the job, and they were all so impressed with the quality and with the way it came together. [Wall panels] are great products."

Hopes are high that this positive learning experience with wall panels will reach beyond Amedore Homes. "Years ago you wouldn't associate wall panels with good quality. But quality control is much greater now than it ever has been, and as technology progresses and as people continue to use pre-manufactured products (floor trusses, roof trusses, wall panels, even pre-hung doors) the acceptability of each product will rise," said George. "As builders venture out to use wall panels, one after the other will have a good experi-



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ence. When others see their successes, more will jump on the bandwagon."

Happily Ever After

Not only was a good deed accomplished through this *Extreme Makeover*, but something much larger took place thanks to the use of wall panels in this project. One company able to overcome its pre-conceived notions and open a new door for their business, and a whole region was able to learn about and gain an appreciation for wall panels, which was a huge step for the industry.

"I know this experience really opened up a lot of peoples' eyes as to what the product is. It was a great learning curve for them as well as for this region. The project opened up this marketplace for the product," commented George. "As a matter of fact we are in discussion with NEPT right now to reevaluate all of our product line and see how we can start bringing wall panels into our production." **SBC**



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