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MAKEOVER ISSUE

Three Kitchens:
Small Steps
to Big Splash

Kenwood Home's
Dramatic Rebirth

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Cause and Effect



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BEFORE & AFTER

Hebron homeowner wins a kitchen makeover after giving to a great cause

By Sarah J. Dills | Photos by Michael Felts

Thom Kuehneman didn't expect exciting news when his phone rang the afternoon of September 30, 2009. So he was shocked to hear the voice on the other end of the line informing him that he'd just won a \$25,000 kitchen makeover from Keith Desserich and the team at Restoraid. ♦ "I had to send Keith an e-mail to confirm that I'd won, because I thought it was a joke," Kuehneman explains of learning his name had been announced on Warm 98 radio station as the winner of a contest he'd entered. "I saw the drawing in the newspaper, and for some reason I felt I needed to buy a ticket." ♦ Maybe it was because his almost 15-year-old kitchen was dated, maybe it was because he'd been to Home Depot to look at countertops three weeks earlier, or maybe it was because the contest spoke to him as a father.

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LEFT: Broken beer bottles sparkle beneath the polished surface of the custom concrete countertops.



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BEFORE & AFTER



The money Kuehneman spent on his entry ticket for the contest went to The Cure Starts Now, a non-profit organization devoted to finding a cure for pediatric brain cancer. The organization was conceived by the courage and faith Elena Desserich, Keith and Brooke Desserich's oldest daughter, displayed while she battled the disease.

After Elena passed away, the Desserich family wanted to personally contribute to the organization that started because of their daughter. "We found ourselves asking what we could do personally to help raise money for The Cure Starts Now," Desserich explains about coming up with the idea for the kitchen makeover. "There are huge companies that support the organization. Graeter's has an ice cream named after Elena, and it's sold nationwide at

Kroger. I wanted to feel like I was contributing personally. I have a remodeling business, so we decided to have a drawing for a free kitchen makeover."

Elena's kitchen

Desserich owns Restoraaid, a family business that began as a disaster restoration company but soon grew to include remodeling when clients starting calling the crew to come back into their homes for more planned projects.

Desserich and his uncle, Douglas, paid for Kuehneman's kitchen renovation out of pocket even though the housing market plummeted during the planning and implementation of the fundraiser.

"A lot of companies had to back out due to economic times, but we knew this was something we had to do," Desserich says.

"It was our way of honoring the charity that Elena started."

Desserich clarifies that a few companies were able to stay on and see the project to the end. For example, Patterned Concrete donated all of the material and labor to build and install the custom, concrete countertops. "I cannot give them enough accolades," Desserich says. "The countertops actually have broken beer bottles embedded in them, which is what Thom wanted. They can create anything with concrete."

The team at Restoraaid worked diligently to bring Kuehneman's kitchen in on budget, but in the end Desserich says the kitchen cost about \$36,000. "It was a challenge as to how many things we could fit in the kitchen on budget," he explains. "It could not have gone to



a more deserving person though. Thom was right there beside us working to cut costs where he could.”

“I installed one side, and they installed the other,” Kuehneman says of his travertine tile backsplash. “As the crew was hanging the cabinets, I was painting. It was definitely a team effort.” 🍷

ABOVE: The lyptus wood cabinets bring more warmth and depth to the kitchen and pop against the new light finish of the hardwood flooring.

RESOURCES

Kitchen designer: Keith Desserich;
Contractor: Restoraidd Remodeling and Design; **Cabinetry:** Showplace Wood Cabinetry; **Countertops:** Patterned Concrete of Cincinnati



Keith and Brooke Desserich's oldest daughter Elena was diagnosed with pediatric brain cancer at the tender age of six. In her final days, Elena inspired her community to rally together to find a cure not just for pediatric brain cancer, but all cancers. Thus, The Cure Starts Now was conceived.

“We didn't want to do it,” Keith Desserich explains of initial attempts from family and friends to start an organization. “A bunch of people were doing fundraisers to raise money for us, and we just wanted to give the proceeds to hospitals for research. But the hospitals wouldn't take money strictly for research. They said it would go into a general fund. I didn't want to see Elena's memory used to buy benches or landscaping. I wanted it to help find a cure.”

On one of Desserich's many sleepless nights during Elena's battle, he couldn't stop thinking that, if parents still had to hear that their children only had a ten percent chance of survival, standard cancer research must be missing something. So, he called Elena's doctor and was shocked when the doctor essentially agreed. The next day, Desserich's daily journal entry was titled "The Cure Starts Now." Three months after they lost Elena, the Desserich family launched their cause under that title.

Desserich is amazed at how rapidly the organization is growing. Seventeen chapters have opened in the last six months across the country. They have even reached international status with a chapter in Australia. “I believe we'll be in 40 states by the end of 2010,” he adds.

The Desserichs recently released a book titled, *Notes Left Behind*. Written for their younger daughter as a memory of the sister she lost, the book chronicles Elena's struggle with cancer, the inspirational messages and artwork she left behind, and the spirit she continues to shine on the world.

For more information about Elena, The Cure Starts Now and *Notes Left Behind*, visit www.thecurestartsnow.org.

