



## Special house built for quadriplegic

Wednesday, October 05, 2005 By REBECCA SALLEE

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When Casey's House is introduced this weekend during the 2005 Parade of Homes, no one will be more proud than builder John Allen of Madison.

Allen, co-owner of Southern Construction and Design, led the construction team for the house, which was built to meet the special needs of 18-year-old Casey Whitson.

In 2003, Whitson, then a Grissom High School student and athlete, was on vacation in Panama City with his father and some friends when he was walking across a street and was struck by a drunk driver.

His devastating injuries include head injuries that prevent him from communicating. Casey cannot walk or move very much on his own. He is now bound to a wheelchair. It's impossible for doctors to know how much he knows about what goes on around him.

One of the biggest obstacles facing his family was how to manage Casey's care in their southeast Huntsville home, Allen said. "Their house was built in the '70s (with) narrow hallways."

Remodeling the family home was a project presented to a charitable contribution committee of the area Home Builders Association.

But with money acquired in an insurance settlement, equity in their existing home, and the promise of substantial donations of time and materials from the home builders, the family opted instead to build a new home. Allen said the project design began in March, building began in May, and the house is now complete and ready to move in.

But first it will be shown during the Parade of Homes to members of the community, many of whom could also benefit from some of its unique amenities, Allen said.

The 4,800-square-foot, two-story brick house is "superinsulated" to help maintain Casey's body temperature. He is susceptible to colds, pollen and allergies, so the home's insulated concrete forms "reduce the air infiltration by almost a factor of five," Allen said.

Casey's room, located downstairs, is a concrete-encased storm shelter. If a tornado warning sounds, the family can join Casey in his room. The four windows that bring in natural light to the room are hurricane-rated but also feature optional aluminum storm shutters. "Effectively, you have a sealed room, which is pretty unique," Allen said.

Casey's rehabilitation room is on the main floor of the house, accessible to him by the residential elevator.

The house also boasts an emergency generator, oversized bathroom and shower, extra-wide halls, a computer and video monitoring system, wheelchair access ramps, and other features for Casey's care.

The family has "integrated Casey with this house in every room," Allen said. "He's a member of the family, always will be."

Allen can't begin to estimate the amount of time he and other volunteers donated to the cause. "I haven't put it into numbers. It's been an all-involving project," he said. "Hundreds and hundreds of hours we've all collectively put into it. But it's a good thing."

At the end of the Parade of Homes in mid-October, Allen said, the family will move in.

"It's going to be great to turn the keys over to them and know Casey's got a house he can be rehabilitated in," he said.

Casey's House is at 707 Marina Park Drive.

For more information on the Parade of Homes, look for the special section in Sunday's Huntsville Times.

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