



From The Ground Up team of twntysomethings ready to finish a luxurious mansion in Oakville. From left to right: Back row: Michel Fournier, Ryan Lucier, Sheldon Robertson, Ryan Anderson, Robert Rames, Cory Sr. Croix From row: Lynsey Bennett, Jacqueline Lahaise, Tran Nguyen, Debbie Travis, Stephanie Parris, Leah Thurston, Jodi Stapleton . Photo by Tim Layes. Right photo by Jason Okolisan.

Travis and her team introduced themselves to all of the surrounding families, and presented them with a bottle of champagne to help loosen things up.

Hence the idea for the series was born – that and the fact that her own teenage sons (17 and 18) were coming into this stage of their life themselves and things were hitting a little close to home. After interviewing over 7,000 potential “protégés” Travis chose 12 young people from diverse backgrounds and work experience to see if they had what it took to learn how to build and design a home...all in five weeks, and living and working together 24 hours a day, with the cameras rolling. “I think we have to bring back the trades, but bring it back with honour. Builders today are making as much as lawyers.” Travis emphatically states.

So she set off for Oakville, away from the problems of big city traffic and parking restrictions, and in a neighbourhood where million dollar homes were the norm, as were major renovations. Anxious to ensure that the neighbours were comfortable with the disruption they might make to the quiet street, Travis and her team introduced themselves to all of the surrounding families, and presented them with a bottle of champagne to help loosen things up. Debbie found working with Tribute Communities and the Town Of Oakville to be one of the best experiences she has had in her renovation work.

“We felt we wanted to be somewhere where we could build a mansion, something really big. And also, we didn’t want to have the problems of downtown; the parking, and all that. The community was fabulous. We looked at a few areas, but we met with the mayor and she was great. We did everything by the book, we got all our permits.” Tribute Communities was anxious to be involved with the project as they themselves were facing the same problems Debbie had witness with young people not wanting to get their hands dirty; a lack of apprentice trades people willing to work hard to learn a craft and build high quality homes.

With over 400 people working on the show over five weeks, this was a massive undertaking and Travis was happy to have the support of the town, including

Mayor Ann Mulvale, and the use of a church down the street where they could park and meet.

Mayor Mulvale was enthusiastic in her support of Debbie, and the show’s concept. “What a great opportunity for young people to explore a trade while working as a team gaining “real” work experience: the people of Oakville watched the progress with great interest enjoying having a celebrity in town”



The series was filmed in fall 2005, and the only disruptions the crew and Debbie felt were the cries of “Hey Debbie” from nearby high school students as they made their way past the home. (Debbie spoke to

the Oakville Trafalgar high school about the importance of trades in a seminar given at the school, her way of giving back a bit to the community who embraced her, and her show.) Twelve people, including a lawyer, a welfare recipient, ex-roofer, grocery clerk, on-line poker player, an aesthetician, even a former Miss Canada, and other disgruntled players, were told only that they were to take five weeks, unpaid, out of their lives to get hands on experience in the building and design world with Debbie Travis. “We have the biggest boom in construction and we have all these kids who can’t find a passion. I can’t teach them to be master carpenters in five weeks, but I can teach them to find a passion.” What the protégés weren’t told was that by the end of the 10 show series, viewers would be phoning in live to vote on the lucky recipient of up to \$250,000 profit from the sale of the home. The live episode will be filmed on location at the house at the end of June, where Debbie is hopeful many Oakville residents will turn out to partake in the fun.

Traveling back and forth between Oakville and Montreal, where Travis has her primary residence, is not unusual for the busy entrepreneur. Debbie Travis was born and raised in Lancashire, in the north of England. After Art College and a successful modeling career, she entered the television industry as a freelance editor and producer. She started her own production company, which specialized in documentaries. It was in 1985, at a CBC party in Cannes that she met her husband, a Canadian television distributor. After they married, they moved to Canada where they settled in Montreal. Debbie started painting houses, which quickly blossomed into a successful business, complete with her own studio. She decided to make an instructional painting video, and the rest, as they say, is history.

It was not surprising that when Canadian Tire decided to focus its marketing efforts on the female side of the business (versus their traditional male-oriented strategy), that Debbie Travis was a perfect fit. They described her as a “Canadian design icon”. This spring Canadian Tire launched a full line of Debbie Travis home décor products, to