

Cottage & Lakefront Living Show offers glimpse of good life

By Cami Reister | The Grand Rapids Press

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Emily Zoladz | The Grand Rapids Press

From left, Matt Klein and Jon Harper, of Lakeside Exteriors, work on a cottage built inside DeVos Place for the Falcon Custom Homes exhibit at the Cottage & Lakefront Living Show.

GRAND RAPIDS -- In their own version of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," crews and subcontractors for Falcon Custom Homes have been working around the clock for four days building a house from start to finish, including landscaping.

No, it wasn't for a demanding, impatient customer. It was for the **2010 Cottage & Lakefront Living Show** opening Friday at DeVos Place.

The company built a 1,200-square-foot, two-story cottage-style home that is 16 feet wide and 32 feet deep inside the DeVos Place exhibit hall.

Designed by **architect Wayne Visbeen**, the home is ideal for narrow lake lots, said Nathan Abbott, who owns Falcon Custom Homes with Dustin Carpenter.

"It's a pretty impressive home for that size," Abbott said. "We specialize in high-end custom homes, and this cottage is going to showcase those fit and finishes."

The cottage is one of more than 200 exhibits at the show, which plays off the state's more than 11,000 inland lakes and the world's largest freshwater coastline.

"It's such a key part of what we do here in the state of Michigan," said Andrew Alt, publicist for event producer ShowSpan.

Architects, builders, real estate agents, decorators and suppliers for boats, docks and other water toys are among the exhibitors, aimed at appealing to people who already own waterfront cottages, want to own one or who stick to renting one each year.

For others, the show tries to create the cottage experience with a 1,200-square-foot sand lot titled "Monroe Street Beach," a nature and wildlife art show and the "Cottage Living Center," where people can relax in a cottage environment complete with jigsaw puzzles and cozy chairs.

Jeannine Lemmon, of Patriot Realty, will be camped out at the show. Her office specializes in waterfront properties. While the main housing market is starting to show signs of a rebound, cottages and second homes are still struggling, she said.

Prices are down, and listings are up.

"Five years ago, it was difficult to find anything under \$200,000 or even \$250,000," Lemmon said. "Now, there are nice buys between \$100,00 and \$150,000 on all-sports lakes, which is really unheard of, especially within an hour of Grand Rapids."

Lemmon said she also is seeing an increasing number of foreclosures among lakefront properties, which means another hit for prices.

Of the 190 homes on all-sports lakes sold through the Grand Rapids Association of Realtors in 2005, only five were priced below \$100,000, with the lowest price at \$66,900, Lemmon said.

Last year, 29 sold priced under \$100,000, and the lowest was \$24,900.

While those types of pricing trends are never good for sellers, buyers can find a good deal -- if a buyer can be found.

Those who are out there are cautious and often use cash because financing requirements for second homes have tightened up, Lemmon said.

"The economy has really affected people and their discretionary spending, and a second home is definitely a discretionary purchase," she said.

That was one of the reasons behind the small cottage project by Falcon and Visbeen, Abbott said. The basic plans, without many extras featured on the show home, are priced around \$125,000.

"We can do it for a great budget in six to eight weeks on the lot and offer different modules," Abbott said. "Like a Lego set, there are different ways to modify the same house to fit any client."

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IF YOU GO

Cottage & Lakefront Living Show

When: 3-9 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Where: DeVos Place, 303 Monroe Ave. NW

Cost: \$9 for adults, \$4 for ages 6 to 14.

Highlights:

- Professional sand sculptor Janet Moore Schrader builds a medieval castle all weekend. Kids can "storm the castle" at 3 p.m. Sunday.
- Family fishing seminars on Saturday and Sunday. Plus, try out the fishing simulator all weekend.
- Wooden boat builders, landscape painters and wildlife artists will be creating works of art every day during the show.

Details: grcottageshow.com