

Bear haven

Section of Steep Creek reopens after high number of bruin visits forced closure

OUTDOORS • PAGE C1



SUNDAY

October 7, 2007



Gambling on oil

Move by small oil company could embolden independent exploration in Alaska fields

STATE • PAGE A4



JUNEAU EMPIRE

\$1.25

www.juneauempire.com

The voice of Alaska's capital since 1912

Volume 96 No. 239

JDHS graduate builds career on television

Carpenter redesigns homes on popular reality program 'Trading Spaces'

By **KORRY KEEKER**
JUNEAU EMPIRE

A year and a half ago, Juneau-Douglas High School graduate Thad Mills was working commercial construction jobs in Anchorage.

As of Saturday, the 25-year-old is now redesigning residential homes on television sets across the nation.

Mills, with no television experience

in his background, is one of the new carpenters on "Trading Spaces." The seventh season of the popular program debuted Saturday on The Learning Channel (TLC).

Mills planned to fly into town Friday so he could watch the premiere with his family. He hasn't seen much of the first season, except for a roughly edited version

of the first episode and a few clips.

"This whole experience is so crazy and so surreal, that's why I wanted to be home with the family once it happens," Mills said Thursday. "I never thought I'd be on TV and now that it's happening, it's just monumental. I want to experience it with the family and be with them. I honestly don't know what to expect when

I see myself on TV."

The hourlong "Trading Spaces" has developed a cult following during its six-year run on Discovery Home and TLC. The basic premise is that two sets of homeowners redecorate one room of the other's home. The teams have two days and a \$2,000 budget.

Please see **MILLS**, Page A10

About Thad Mills

• **Who:** Thad Mills, 25, stars as a carpenter on the home-modeling reality program "Trading Spaces." Its seventh season began Saturday.

• **On television:** 9 p.m. Saturdays, TLC, Channel 55.

• **Online:** <http://tlc.discovery.com/fansites/tradingspaces/meet-the-crew/thad-mills.html>



THAD MILLS

Mills: Man says his Alaska personality helped land part

Continued from Page A1

Mills, 25, graduated from Juneau-Douglas High School in 2000. He served as an infantryman with the Alaska National Guard, then moved to Anchorage upon his return and began working with the local carpenter's union.

"It's always been a dream of mine to build my own house and raise a family in it," Mills said, on his biographic video on the Trading Spaces Web site. "That's one of the biggest reasons why I got into the carpenter's union."

Mills developed a variety of trades. He was in Anchorage last year working in commercial construction, when one of his friend's girlfriends signed him up for an acting and modeling talent search in town.

Coerced to show up, Mills strutted down a runway and was invited to attend a modeling convention in Florida that June. That's where he randomly met Frontier Booking International agent John Shea, who casts for an assortment of reality television home-makeover shows.

"I met him in the hallway, and he heard I was a carpenter for six years in Alaska and got a little glimpse of the crazy Alaska personality," Mills said. "He was like, 'You gotta be on TV!'"

Shea sent Mills to a handful of auditions, until he finally hooked up with "Trading Spaces." It was fairly mind-blowing, said Mills, who has been watching the show since its first season.

Mills has already signed on for the eighth season, when a larger Los Angeles-based production company plans to take over the show and add more episodes, more marketing and a bigger budget.

"It's such a well-known show," he said. "It's not like getting on a brand new show, where nobody knows what it is. It already has a large fan base."

This year's season was originally going to be called "Trading Spaces: Life By Design," where rooms were remodeled to reflect some sort of transition in the homeowners' lives. That idea

was eventually nixed, and the production company reverted to the tried and true formula.

"I love the whole concept of the tight deadline and only having two days and a small budget of \$2,000 to remodel one room," Mills said.

"We really have to think about the way that we cut every single piece to conserve as much material as possible," he said. "As far as the constraints they put on you, a really good carpenter knows how to balance productivity with quality. If you favor the productivity side, it's going to look like it's rushed. If you favor the quality side, it's not going to get done on time."

Fans have already started coming up to Mills, asking him to work on their homes. But he has no say on where the crew shoots or what homes they select. There's an application process on the "Trading Spaces" Web site.

He does, however, have a say in the jobs. If the designer calls for something that can't be completed in 48 hours or with the available budget, Mills has the power to veto.

That's a relief, since initially he was concerned about making the leap from commercial to residential construction.

"Honestly, when I got started I was freaked out," Mills said. "This is a different kind of carpentry than what I'm used to. It's building the entertainment center, the ottomans, the woodwork and finesse. I definitely had my doubts. But once you get a few projects under your belt, you kick your quality up for sure."

Mills knows his first stab at television will be scrutinized by his fellow Alaska carpenters.

"It's a burden; it's a responsibility," Mills said. "My teachers are watching and my fellow carpenters that I've worked with for the last six years are all watching. I really have to keep that in mind, when I start talking on TV about all the little details."

"I know I've got eyes and ears watching my every move," he said. "But I haven't got any calls yet."

• Contact Korry Keeker at 523-2268 or korry.keeker@juneauempire.com.