

THE HOMES & PEOPLE OF ANDERSON TOWNSHIP

# BEST

## MAGAZINE

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 1

*Donna, Dayton and Dennis Speigel  
in their new Western inspired home  
in Anderson Township.*

Featuring 7 Fabulous Homes and the People Who Bring Them to Life

**MP**  
MAVERICK  
Productions

Seven Dollars



# THE SPEIGELS OF ANDERSON TOWNSHIP

When the idea of a treyed ceiling in deep red with black accents for the master bedroom was first discussed, Donna thought: "It will either be very romantic or like a Chinese Restaurant." Instead, adds Dennis, "it ended up being a wigwam." The 10' long, 9' wide bed is the centerpiece which Dennis says is a labor of love. He told the bed builder in Teton, Idaho: "I want you to build us a bed. A heavy one. I want logs, lots of character, with lots of knarly wood and snow knees (the quick-twisted, curvy part of the head and backboards you see in the photo)." Dennis ended up choosing each piece. Like many items in the Speigel's home, most have a story. The black-bear rug was bought as it was advertised on a Jackson Hole radio program named Trash & Treasure.



## Memorable Moment

An anniversary present from Donna, this hand-tooled saddle is one of Dennis' "favorite things. I love that saddle." While it is now displayed for show and tell, it was in regular service when the couple used to spend up to two months every summer at their home in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. A small brass plaque near the saddle horn says simply: "Mike Castagno, Maker."

# It's a Roller Coaster Life

*Oh, where to begin.* The Speigels. I could make this a love story, or a successful business story. I could fill 10 pages of fine details about their home. Or, 10 pages of funny stories or tall tales as told by Dennis. But then again, it could all be all about their grandson Dayton, who has to have the most caring grandparents in the world, or the school Donna heads in his honor. Or, heck, we could just show photos of their home in Jackson Hole and make you all wish you were there.

I think I'll make it a *I've looked into their eyes and I'll tell you what I saw* story. Spending a day with the Speigels is like riding The Beast at Kings Island 50 times in a row. You know it goes in a big circle but each time it seems different, and each time you laugh.

Dennis is the most instantly likeable guy I've ever met. He laughs, he makes you laugh, he listens. And Jesus, does he love to cook.

Donna is more reserved, but clearly with a purposed mind. She gets started on something she believes in, and doesn't let go. Both have very penetrating eyes, and genuinely like to show their hard-earned trappings of a colorful, entrepreneurial life together. In many ways, *both* are in the entertainment business. On any given day, tens of thousands of people visit one of the theme parks developed by Dennis and his company, and hundreds (some by the busloads) visit one of the dozen Snooty Fox stores founded and managed by Donna.

Dayton is their grandson, one of the Ds in the DDD you see etched on the wine sleeve door in the middle of their hearth room. What Dayton suffers from Angelman Syndrome, he gets back in hugs, affection and lots of hard work from Donna and Dennis, his legal guardians.

We first caught up with Dennis while he was orchestrating the final details on what was to go where in the threesome's new home on one of the steep slopes just above the Ohio River in Anderson Township. At any given time, Dennis can be in some other country, orchestrating much larger things, for example, theme parks. He plans them. He builds them. He figures out attendance expectations and the procurement and installation of rides. Speaking of rides – and this coming from the guy who designed The Racer and King Cobra – he doesn't like the ones that go round and round, such as a carousel or "those teacups." Makes him sick.

## Memorable Moment

Priceless is what Donna Speigel calls her original heirloom turquoise necklace originally worn by her grandmother, a full blooded Chickasaw Indian from Arizona. The necklace design is known as squash blossom. "My dad gave it to my Mom and she gave to me."

It was just a week before Christmas and the couple's plan on moving into their new home before New Year's Day appeared to be impossible at best. But once you get to know Dennis and Donna, you can easily spot the determination that nothing is impossible.

We returned in mid-January to a showplace, nearly everything in its proper place, ready to be given a story by Dennis or Donna. While most of the stories are true and have plenty of color to go with them, some are not. The grandkids are still looking for the "three secret passageways" in the house, and a construction worker wondered aloud if Dennis really rode the Canadian grizzly bear mounted in the hearth room before taking him down with a spear.

While Cincinnati has its legions of famous self-starters who have done well for themselves, a good number left town at the birth of their careers and rarely come back. Dennis got his calling early too, being named the country's All American Boy of 1956 by nationally published *Pageant Magazine*, the *People* magazine of its day. Elvis was featured in the same issue. Born and raised in Amelia, and except for a 9-year stint in Virginia, Dennis has always lived within a few miles of his homestead. At 13, 50 years ago this year, he took a job at Coney Island taking tickets at the gate, launching for him his success story in the theme park business.

Donna is from Phoenix, coming to Cincinnati in 1970 to work summers at Coney Island while attending OU. She worked for Dennis as he moved up the corporate ladder to assistant park manager. They, well, you know, got married, had two kids together, and have been happily ever working ever since, enjoying the ride.

At least until 2002, when life took an unexpected twist. Dayton joined the twosome and empty-nestedness abruptly ended. Dayton, now 7, has what appears to be Angelman Syndrome, a genetic disorder that mimics cerebral palsy, affecting body movements and muscle coordination.

But as noted earlier in this story, the Speigels are of the understanding that *anything is possible*. Donna decided to start a school (see story, page 9) for children suffering from cerebral palsy, spina bifida and other motor challenges. Then she and Dennis turned a 180 and moved from their condo in northern Kentucky, to their new home in Anderson Township – specially equipped for Dayton's needs.

Dennis says that Donna puts in 8 hours a day at the Snooty Fox, 9 hours a day at the school, and does everything else in whatever is left.

The look in their eyes – Donna determination, Dennis fun, and Dayton, an understanding that he is being taken of, and loved – is the Speigel story.

*The Personals, p.74 • More photos ▶*

*Story by Doug Sandbage  
Photography by Helen Adams*





◀ The Speigels found their unique dining room table at the Furniture Mart in Atlanta. The spokes on the surface are inlaid wood with solid granite in-between. The chandelier is a Ralph Lauren, and the Cincinnati skyline painting is by Beverly Erschell. “We didn’t want all Western art,” says Dennis. “We wanted a more contemporary feel for this room, its own personality.” ▼ Upon entering the Speigel home, a plethora of color, and attention to detail hits you like a buffalo stampede. It takes a few minutes to decide which way to go after you ascend the stairs, fenced-in with an acid-washed bronze surface railing to look like it was built from twigs. Chinese 12x12” slate is on the foyer floor and the 175-pound chandelier was found in Texas. A niche was carved out of the far wall to house an Indian chief painted by famed western artist Malcolm Furlow. The painting was gifted to Donna by her grandmother. Ceilings in the house range from 12-22 ft.



### When you’re as fond of pool as Dennis Speigel – a former pool hall manager, the style of the table is just as important as the skill of the player.

“This is more like a piece of art,” says Dennis, “yet functional.” The red felt matches the deep red ceiling. Custom built by WoodLand Creek Furniture in Traverse City, Michigan, the burlled juniper wood table sits in the home’s art gallery – the windows being high hung to accommodate the couple’s love for western art. Dennis is wearing a hand-carved, black cherry cowboy hat given him as a Christmas present from long-time friend Robert S (no period) Brown. The chandelier includes 11 elk horns woven together perfectly, says Dennis, so that it can be evenly balanced with the use of only one chain.

*Continues on p.68 ▶*

**The Speigel kitchen is a chef's dream: so much so that Jean-Robert de Cavel, a frequent visitor and friend to the Speigels, helped design it.**

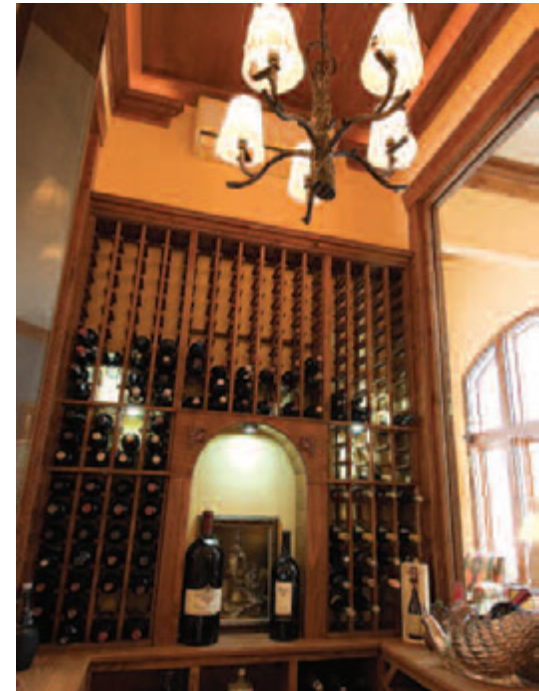
While not small at 700 sq. ft., it is compact, so, says Dennis, "we don't have to walk 1,000 miles when cooking." The design is also very conducive for chats with Donna, Dayton and visitors, and to watch TV, Dennis' favorite being The Food Network. Speaking of TV, Dennis likes watching so much that at any time, while cooking, he can see three sets: one above the Wolf range, one above the Sub-Zero refrigerator, and the third, a big screen in the hearth room. The knotty alder cabinetry, American cherry floor, and the black-stone backsplash is a reflection of the couple's love of the West. Larger Kalco pendant lights cover the breakfast island, while nearby low-voltage mini-pendants give a soft glow to the overall kitchen. Other kitchen features include four sinks, Mascarella granite countertops, and a Wolf steamer that Dennis says he uses every day to make everything from vegetables, clams, fish, and spaghetti. The appliances and the home's plumbing were purchased from Ferguson Bath, Kitchen and Lighting Gallery. The kitchen is clearly Dennis' playground; he loves to cook. "Every time I go in there I just stop and look at it," he says.



*Continues on p.72 ▶*

Although Dennis affectionately calls this room the car wash, it is far from it. It's more of a "wet room," says Donna. Eight spray heads on the far wall, with a full glass enclosure and whirlpool spa, help make anyone who enters squeaky clean and easily seen. The bathroom and the dining room were chosen by Donna and Dennis to be more contemporary in style, though a South American steer skull with horns adorns the shower canopy. The 420 sq. ft. bathroom was designed with the help of Susan Barrett, a designer with Interior Project Management on Victory Parkway. 12X12" Chinese slate covers the floor and a Versace chandelier the ceiling.





*Continued from p.69*



Why hide the wine when you plan to enjoy it . . . often. The Speigels decided from the get-go that their new home would be different and with a lot of help from their builder Chris Rodgers, Wine Cellar Innovations, and 500 bottles of wine, they built what Dennis calls a wine sleeve. "We wanted an open concept, centrally located so that you can see it when you come in. We have glass on three sides with the fourth side reserved for hanging artwork (on the outside of the sleeve)." The redwood interior is temperature controlled and at the time *Best* visited was home to a very special bottle of wine, compliments of one of the Spiegel's best friends and their attorney, Robert S (no period) Brown. It's a 1961 Chateau Haut-Brion, "the wine of the century" valued at \$5,000 said Dennis.

*Continues on p.74* ▶



# The Personals

## Donna & Dennis Speigel

### Professions / Extra-Curricular Passions

**Dennis:** President and founder, International Theme Park Services, Inc., Cincinnati. The company does everything from design, to operations, to training for those wanting to develop a new entertainment facility, or improve an existing one. In its 25 years, it has been involved in more than 450 projects in over 40 countries. Clients have included: theme parks, amusement parks, water parks, family entertainment centers, zoos, aquariums, museums, hall of fames, sporting venues, and resorts. Dennis started his career at age 13 as a ticket taker at Coney Island, eventually becoming an assistant manager at the park. From there he moved to Kings Island as assistant general manager, and in 1974 moved for 9 years to Richmond, Virginia to build and manage Kings Dominion Park. He returned to Cincinnati to work in the international theme park division for Taft Broadcasting before starting the company he owns now. Of interesting note, Dennis designed the Racer coaster at Kings Island in 1972. A year later, with good friend Reinhold Spieldiener, some bar napkins, and a few cocktails at Chester's Roadhouse, they designed the world's first looping roller coaster – The King Cobra, a fixture at both Kings Island and Kings Dominion. Dennis still has the napkin with the original drawing. He is a graduate of Morehead State University with a Bachelor of Science degree. About life so far: "It's been fun," he says.

**Donna:** Founder, President and CEO of The Snooty Fox, currently a group of 12 greater Cincinnati stores; 7 that sell clothing, 5 that sell furniture. Donna opened her first store in Terrace Park in 1980. The shops now have more than 100,000 registered consignors who get half of what their contributed

items sell for. "It really started as a little idea and now I feel like a pioneer in this industry," says Donna. Collectively, the stores do about \$5 million + in sales each year.

Donna's college job was managing the Kings Island Preview Center at Coney Island and her boss was Dennis. She went on to become the first female director in Taft Broadcasting's theme park division. She volunteers her time with the James E. Biggs Family Resource Center, St. Ursula Villa, and the Anderson Junior Women's Club of Cincinnati. In 2006, she was among several women named as Career Women of Achievement by the YWCA of Greater Cincinnati. Most near to her heart: serving as President of the Conductive Learning Center of Greater Cincinnati (see page 9 for details).

### Children

Jamie, 39, Mt. Carmel; Austin 32, Mt. Adams; and Taylor, 29, Covington. Grandkids: Blake, Spencer, Felicia, Dayton and Brailyn.

### Getting Started Together

It was 1970. Dennis was then the assistant park manager for Coney Island and hired OU college freshman Donna Douthit to manage the Kings Island Preview Center at Coney. Two years later she became Director of Guest Relations when Kings Island opened. At some point, says Donna, he asked me "who I went out with . . . little did I know. I married my boss and lost my job." They moved to Richmond, Virginia where kids Austin and Taylor and the idea for the Snooty Fox were born – Donna had maternity clothes she needed to part with and would anybody want to buy them?

Dennis says that Donna's Chickasaw Indian ancestry makes her appear that she could be from anywhere in the world. "In Brazil, she looks Brazilian. In Italy, Italian. In Mexico, Mexican. People start talking to her in their language. "She is the most energetic person I've ever met," adds Dennis. "And still beautiful. Its been a lot of fun and been silly." Donna nods lovingly to the man she married 34 years ago: "He makes me laugh."

### Marketing the Snooty Fox

What began in 1980 as a small resale shop in Terrace Park – "I wanted to be near where the money is" – is now 12 stores strong: 10 in the Cincinnati burbs, 2 in Northern Kentucky. The Snooty Fox, says Donna, is doing well, maybe even especially so in the down economy. "We price items to move and we average 2,000 consigned purchases a day." Donna is the company's CEO and president, and handles the marketing. "I love what I do."

The company's 100+ employees are charged with making sure customers have fun, and if they've come to sell the shop something, that they also buy something in return before they leave. "Bring one in, buy one," Donna says is the store's unofficial motto. "We have great managers, a great staff. I like to motivate people and see them grow," adds Donna. One of the company's more popular marketing endeavors is to charter busses filled with shoppers from other Ohio cities, Kentucky and Indiana and bring them to Cincinnati for a day that includes lunch, desserts, discount coupons, and, of course, tours of all the Snooty Fox stores.

### Big Love

Donna and Dennis like to ride self-propelled bikes, taking trips to the Burgandy and Dordogne regions of France and Umbria in Italy. Dennis also likes bikes with motors, owning four Harley Davidsons and one Honda. While their vacations and 7 million air miles of business travel have taken them all over the world, Jackson Hole, Wyoming remains the couple's favorite – a special place still unheard of by many people, says Dennis. Jackson Hole sits on the southern edge of The Grand Tetons National Park and is well regarded for its skiing and abundance of wildlife, including about 7,500 elk during winter grazing.

Interestingly, says Dennis, their most recent "best trip" was taking Dayton on a Disney cruise and three days to DisneyWorld. "Dayton was treated like a prince," says Dennis, noting Disney's attention to special needs children.

### Jobs Dennis Has Had & First 15 Minutes of Fame in 1956

- Bouncer for 3½ years at The Inner Circle in Clifton (now Bogarts).
- Pool hall manager for 1½ years.
- Ticket taker at Coney Island.
- Restaurant owner, The Diner. Bought it in '89, sold it in '92.
- Movie Star. Dennis appeared as himself in the 1977 film *Rollercoaster*, starring George Segal. At the time, Dennis was the general manager of Kings Dominion Park in Richmond, Virginia, where *Rollercoaster* was filmed in part. His big line: "Would somebody please tell me what's going on around here." Dennis said the line was perfect since "I was already saying that 35 times a day."



- **All American Boy.** In July 1956 and at just 10 years old, Dennis was named THE All American Boy in the USA by *Pageant Magazine*, sort of a cross between today's *People* magazine and the humor in *Reader's Digest* and *Playboy*. In the same issue, Dennis notes, is a story about another up-and-comer: Elvis. Dennis' grade school principal in Amelia nominated him for the American Boy award.



Grandson Dayton's bedroom continues the home's primary western style design with its cowboy rug and bedding (purchased from Pottery Barn), horseshoe art, and an over-sized wood canopy bed. The bed was purchased through one of Donna's own Snooty Fox stores.

### The Jean-Robert Connection

Dennis loves to cook. Thirteen years ago, while he and Donna were dining at The Maisonette, Dennis commented that he "would give anything to cook there just once." Donna secretly arranged the dream-to-come-true and thinking it would be an hour or two, Dennis emerged 12 hours later where "I learned more in there than I did in the previous 25 years." It "flamed" a big friendship with famed chef Jean-Robert de Cavel, and the two now share their home kitchens for frequent get-togethers. In 2006, Dennis invited Jean-Robert, David Cook of DaVeed's, David Falk of Boca, Alex Chin of Pacific Moon, Gary Boswell of Pigall's, attorney Robert Brown and good friend Mu Sinclair to a 5 day "Chefs Off" in the Speigel's Jackson Hole home. Dog sledding, snowmobiling, fine wines, pillow fights, caviar, and a bit of moonshine caused, says Dennis, Jean-Robert to proclaim: "I've never seen anything like this!"

### Who Did It?

The following businesses were identified by this homeowner as having been significantly involved in the home's architecture, design and/or landscaping in recent years:

Builder: Chris Rodgers of Christopher Robin Homes ("Not once, in the building process, did we have a cross word between us," says Dennis Speigel). Architect: John Beltz. Landscaping: Randy & Pam Simmons. Kitchen Design: Dennis Speigel and Jean-Robert de Cavel. Interior Design: Susan Barrett of Interior Project Management.