



A Top-shelf Career

East Tennessee proved the perfect spot for this former engineer and fashion model to begin yet another job.

Do you think I'm weird?" That tiny bit of insecurity peeking through a conversation with Colleen Landaiche probably saves her from an onslaught of envy from us mere mortals. The 39-year-old Kingston resident isn't at all weird—just vastly accomplished.

Not only has she won Presidential accolades for her work as an aerospace engineer—while moonlighting as a fashion model—but she also holds a pilot's license, plays musical instruments, and now runs a custom-shelving business from her home in East Tennessee. And she does all this while dedicating herself to her husband, Greg, and 5-year-old son, Carey.

Sheesh. Yet when you meet this talented woman, the overwhelming impression of her is likability, reinforced by that endearing insecurity. You don't hate her because she's beautiful—and brilliant. You like her; you really like her.

Beauty and Brains

The Michigan native never met a number she didn't like. "My thoughts are organized," she says. "That's why physics and math came so easily." So easily, Colleen taught calculus to college students while still in high school. She tutored upperclassmen in physics while a college freshman, and became a Lockheed engineer while a University of Michigan junior.

After graduation, Colleen worked in Silicon Valley from 1984 until 1989, then moved from California to Germany to serve as an engineer (and part-time fashion model) from 1989 to 1994. There she met her husband Greg, an American computer programmer who grew up in Venezuela. While working with Lockheed, the couple toured Europe and parts of Africa. Then the world travelers made a choice. "We decided to work where the living is, instead of live where the work is," Colleen says.



above, left: Greg, Colleen, and Carey Landaiche clown around in one of two Murphy beds Greg built for a large hallway in their home. **top:** The Landaiches' current home features Colleen's shelves in virtually every room. **above:** Colleen began HouseWerks.com when friends admired the birch plywood shelving they saw in her home.

A book, *Places Rated Almanac*, touted Knoxville as one of the best cities to live in the United States, so the couple winged their way to East Tennessee in 1994. "We landed and bought this property on the same day," Colleen says about their Roane County acreage in Kingston. The Landaiches called on William Mims, a Hermitage architect trained at the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, to design their home. The Wright-inspired house overlooks Watts Bar Lake and boasts a spectacular view. ▶



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Shelving a Career

The setting was perfect; the job market was not. "I thought we would get jobs immediately because we both have sparkling resumes, we're both hard workers, and we're problem solvers," says Colleen. "But there was downsizing in the government." Expected employment at nearby Oak Ridge never materialized.

"When the house was all done and we were ready to move in, there were a whole bunch of built-ins that we couldn't afford to have done," Colleen says.

She possessed limited wood-working experience. "I could hammer," she says, "but I didn't know anything about finishing wood. I didn't know anything about joints or miters or jigs or clamps. I just started cutting wood with a saw and made shelves."

Creating HouseWerks

Visitors admired the strong, attractive birch plywood shelves Colleen created for her home and clamored for their own. So she started HouseWerks.com custom shelving in 2001. "If you make your house really organized, you can make your house work for you," she says by way of explaining the name. (HouseWerks was already taken.) She built the first HouseWerks shelves in leased space through the Community Reuse Organization of East Tennessee in Oak Ridge. Soon, Colleen's Web site attracted customers beyond Tennessee borders. So far, she's shipped to Virginia, New York, Nevada, California, Florida, Michigan, Oregon, and Utah. The shelves are priced at \$17 per linear foot and come with a forever guarantee.

Currently, she works from a three-story, 1,500-square-foot shop next to her home. The tidy shop boasts a radial arm saw, a compound miter shop saw, a table saw, a drill press, a nail gun, a plunge router, a staining and



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Colleen Landaiche

drying rack, and a table router.

"I've bought tools that I didn't know how to use, then sat and read the manual," Colleen says. "[My husband] is the most supportive man I've ever known. He's never complained about anything I've done."

Greg's trust is well-founded. "HouseWerks is doing well," says Colleen, "and I can see that it's going to grow." To meet that expectation, the Landaiches recently purchased 11 acres near their present home. They plan to sell their house and build again, this time with the HouseWerks shop set apart from their residence for more privacy.

Best of all, "we'll be on the water," says Colleen with a smile. The active family enjoys going out in their pontoon boat and personal watercraft. "My 5-year-old and I are on the lake until about 9 or 9:30 every night during the summer."

If that sounds like a lot of playtime, remember, she's here to work where the living is, not live where the work is. For that sentiment, you've just got to love her.

NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON

For more information on HouseWerks.com, call (865) 717-3200, or visit www.housewerks.com.



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