

# Designed for Success

## Judy Nagengast Makes a Difference in Her Adopted Home

By Tom Schuman

**J**udy Nagengast grew up in Cleveland and lived in the Detroit area before coming to Anderson with her husband, Bill, in 1985. At the time, she didn't necessarily expect to be in the community 21 years later.

Bill worked for General Motors' Guide Lamp Division. Seeing a need for additional staff, he started Continental Design & Engineering and contracted the employees to General Motors. Judy took over as CEO in 1987 (Bill is the chief operating officer). Between 1987 and 2001, Continental experienced annual growth of more than 30%. It now has more than 350 employees and \$40 million in annual revenues.

"I really liked the fact that you weren't driving all the time. Anderson is a relatively small city," she says, "but still has all the amenities. The people were very friendly. Even though Anderson had lost a lot of jobs, we had quite a bit of work with the three major employers for a long time."

Nagengast has turned business success into community passion. Her efforts benefit both young people in need and entrepreneurs looking to get their start – like her and her husband more than two decades ago.

The Wilson Boys and Girls Club is a safe haven for many children. It is their place to go after school because no one else is home or for recreational and learning opportunities. Donations and grants are the funding lifeblood, making it a constant challenge to provide enough resources.

Nagengast has created and managed a number of fund-raising activities for Wilson's. In addition to the traditional membership campaigns and golf outings, she developed the Anderson Cruis'n and Fly'n. This vintage automobile show and festival has become a major downtown event, benefiting the community in many ways.

"There are a lot of charities, a lot of things you can support," she offers. "For me it's kids and education. Those are my two causes, what fills my interests. And the Boys and Girls Club is right there with those interests. When you go inside and talk to the kids, you see that it gives them a great positive environment."

A capital campaign, led by Nagengast, allowed the Boys and Girls Club to move into a former elementary school, providing an upgrade from the previous building. Additional ongoing fund-raisers are in the works. A tutoring program is being revised in an attempt to comply with No Child Left Behind guidelines, making it eligible for federal funding.

Nagengast also assists in a program that helps troubled teens, with her friend actually taking the students into her own home and providing one-on-one counseling. Nagengast terms it "really rewarding" and adds, "Kids don't understand what drugs can do to them long-term."

Continental employees follow their leader, becoming involved in work at Wilson's, donating presents and wrapping gifts for an annual Christmas toy drive and much more.

### On the job

Nagengast, an inductee with her husband into the Madison County Business Hall of Fame, brought several community groups together to create the Madison County Lifetime Achievement Award. Longtime local business leader Jim Ault received the first honor, which will continue on a biannual basis.

The always-on-the-go Nagengast hasn't forgotten about business people trying to make their mark in Anderson. She served as interim

Judy Nagengast has guided the growth of her company, while giving back to the community.



executive director of the Flagship Enterprise Center, playing a critical role in the design and early operation of the business incubator. She even formed classes (through Anderson University) for entrepreneurs and has been an active role model for women seeking to break into the business world.

“The incubator is great for the community. I could have used it when we started here. There were a lot of things I had to learn,” she admits. “I really liked working with the entrepreneurs, everything from someone wanting to open an ice cream shop to dealing with nanotechnology. Having started a business and having been there and done it, I felt I had a lot to offer.

“That’s like my baby over there,” she continues, gesturing toward the building located near her headquarters in the Flagship Business Park. “I’m real proud how that turned out. It was a learning experience for me. I learned how to work with government, which is helping us with Continental. Government, education and business all operate differently. You have to understand how they all think.”

Although Anderson is now home – “I didn’t see anything another community could have given us that Anderson doesn’t” – Nagengast also brings a different outlook than many to the community’s past and future.

“I have a little bit of a more unique perspective. While GM was certainly a positive while it lasted, the negative was that its presence didn’t encourage other companies to come into Anderson. We didn’t see a lot of entrepreneurial growth.

“But we have a mayor who really seems to understand economic development,” she continues. “We need more jobs, but I think Anderson is really a vacuum waiting to fill up. It’s a tough situation we’re in with GM pulling out, but I don’t think it’s a situation we can’t handle or deal with.”

### Bigger business

Continental is a service business, putting customer response at the top of the priority list. The traditional design and engineering has been taking place over the 21-year history of the company. A subsidiary, Continental Quality Engineering specializes in inspections, separating good parts from bad parts, finding the root causes of problems with customers’ equipment and machinery. A professional services division facilitates branching out into other business areas, including staffing a forestry program.

The company once had satellite offices in Indianapolis and Detroit. The Internet, however, has been a big factor in all operations being consolidated back in Anderson. (Nagengast does note, however, that fewer people are currently operating out of that office as on-site work and consultation are part of the changing climate).

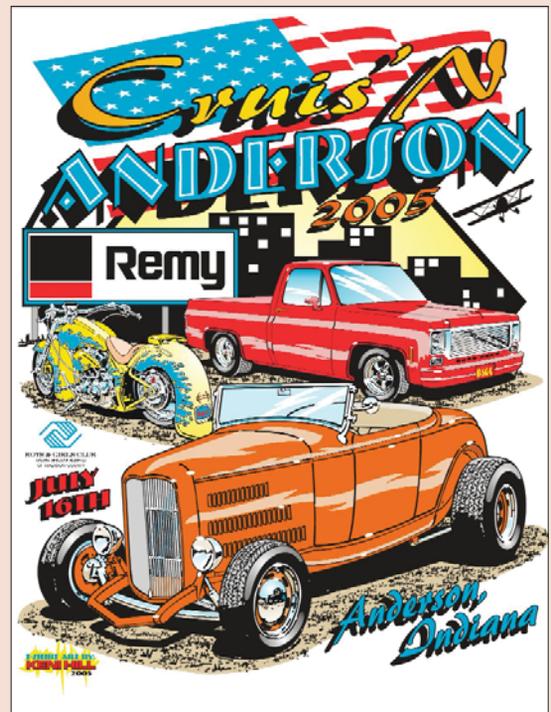
“With the Internet, we’ve been able to find people. We’ve expanded our capabilities. Companies are finding us through our web site. In dealing with manufacturers, it’s really understanding their niche.”

The extensive community involvement from Nagengast is done for personal reasons, but the business implications can’t be ignored.

“In the auto industry, it (gaining business) comes down to price,” Nagengast states. “With some customers, especially local companies, the fact that they know we’re involved, they know we’re committed, it does make a difference. You have to give back. This community has been very good to us.”



Continental Design & Engineering has diversified in recent years to help meet client needs.



Nagengast coordinated development of this annual event to benefit the Wilson Boys and Girls Club.

### INFORMATION LINK

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