

A DREAM FULFILLED

The First Annual “Designing Dreams” Recipients Enjoy Their New Family Room and Kitchen, Compliments of Allison Havill Todd Interiors and Many Generous Sponsors

[WRITTEN BY JULIE HOSTETTER]

When TIMES GET TOUGH, such as the eruption of a family illness or financial crisis, everything seems to freeze in time. Needed improvement projects are left abandoned and homes quickly fall into disrepair. Last year, local Cumming interior designer Allison Havill Todd came to *Points North* magazine with an idea. She was tired of all the bad news on the television and wanted to do something positive for the Northside community. So she decided to put her skills to good use. After all, she has seen first-hand again and again how a fresh new design can make a momentous difference to not only the aesthetics of the home, but more importantly, the family dwelling there.

So she launched her charitable vision, “Designing

Dreams” — an organization that would award a family in emotional or financial crisis a \$20,000 room makeover by Allison Havill Todd Interiors. After hearing Todd’s passion for the project, *Points North* quickly signed on as a media sponsor and soon many local contractors and businesses joined in the mission to renovate the chosen family’s room of choice just in time for their Thanksgiving feast.

Many letters poured in nominating area Northside families in need of a room makeover, and while there were many deserving families to choose from, husband and wife Joe Wampler and Angie Patrick’s story touched the judges’ hearts the deepest, and they

were awarded the first annual Designing Dreams makeover.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF ROB SMITH UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE



Joe, Angie and “Princess Olivia”



Family Room Before



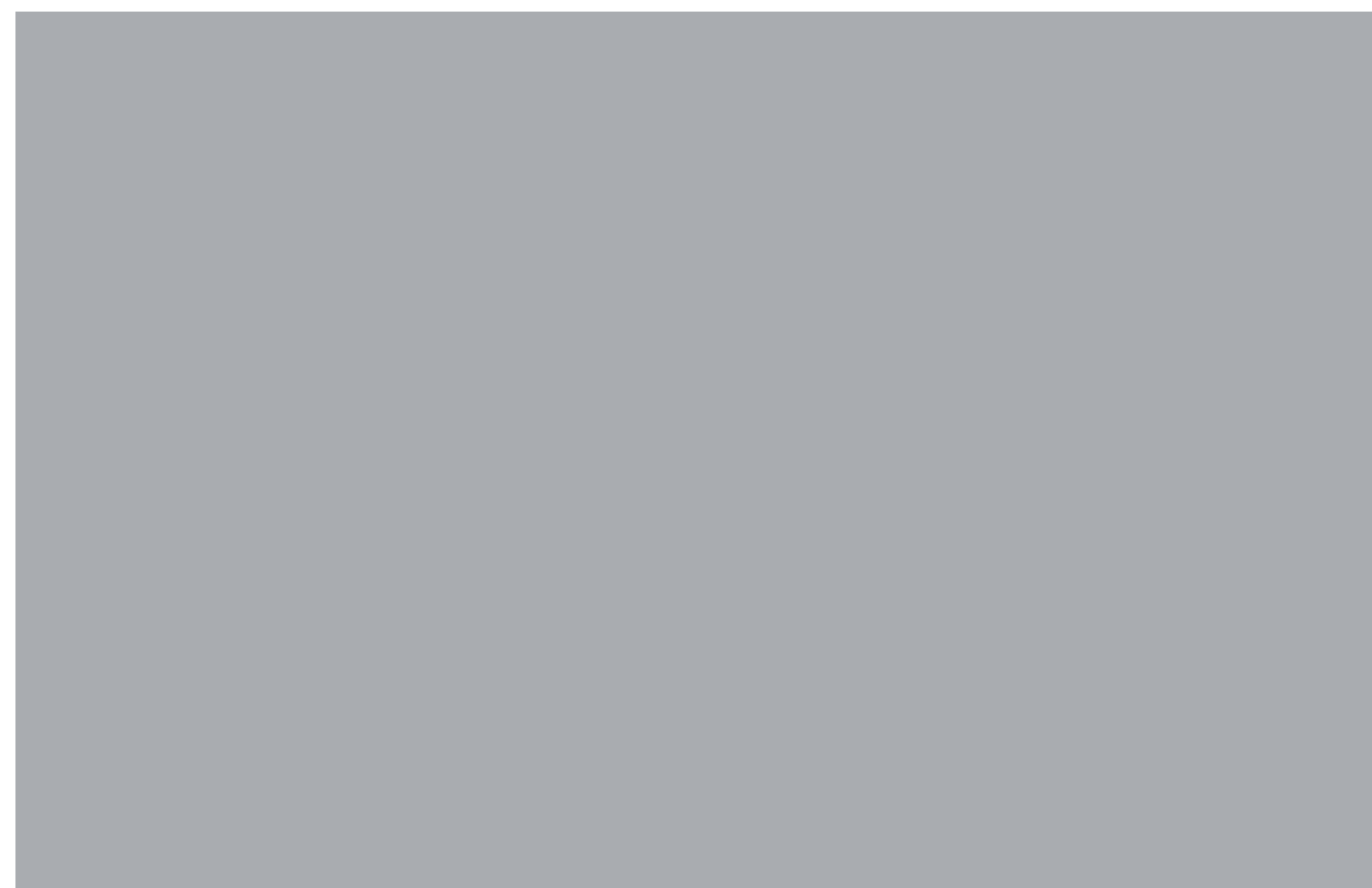
Left: The new kitchen design included refurbished cabinets, granite countertops and a tile back splash. **Right:** The brick fireplace was painted to modernize the look and built-in bookshelves offer much needed storage.

Meet the Family of "Princess Olivia"

Cumming residents Joe and Angie were a devoted couple that longed to have a child to make their family complete. After Angie suffered through a history of miscarriages, they discovered she was pregnant again, only to lose yet another child. Diagnosed with fibroid tumors after her fourth miscarriage, Angie was treated and then sent home but she didn't feel quite right, so she went back to the doctor and discovered that one of those "tumors" had a heartbeat. Only one child had been miscarried; her twin had survived and Joe and Angie were overjoyed. But when Angie was just 24 weeks pregnant, she went into early labor, and Olivia

Lior Wampler was born weighing just 1 pound and 11 ounces.

Olivia remained in the NICU for almost seven months before returning home with the couple, who "learned how to care for their daughter the only way they knew how — with strength, determination, love and humor," wrote Olivia's special needs classroom teacher, Carolyn Tolland, who nominated them for the makeover. Olivia was legally blind, with several communication delays and a host of medical issues. Joe stopped working in home maintenance to become a full-time, stay-at-home dad (and PTA president), while Angie went back to work to support the family. They





Family Room Before

Dark paneling was removed and modern accessories were added in the family room.

DREAMING BIG IN 2010

Do you know of a family in distress you would like to nominate for this year's Designing Dreams, or are you a local business interested in getting involved in the 2010 project? If so, please visit www.designingdreams.org for more information.

found a wonderful little fixer upper — a 132-year-old house in Cumming — with Joe's great expectations to bring it back to its former glory.

Joe began his renovations but in October 2008 their world came to a crashing halt — 4 ½-year-old Olivia was diagnosed with two brain tumors, one of which was cancerous. Between doctor appointments, chemotherapy, feeding tubes and unexplained seizures, all renovations ceased as they struggled to care for their daughter and deal with all the problems of a century-old home.

"We were proud of the progress we were making [on the house] but we were embarrassed it had to stop," Angie recalled.

"Things happen, and you have priorities and our priority was to take care of the baby."

Until they got the call, that is.

"When Allison called, I thought it was a prank call, I said, 'now who are you again?'" recalled Angie with a laugh. The work began

in September 2009 and was finished just in time for the family to enjoy Thanksgiving in their new living room and kitchen.

From "What Now" to "Wow"

The room redesign was "life changing" for the family. The carpet and linoleum in their living room and attached kitchen (which were in desperate need of replacement) were removed and replaced with hardwood plank floors. New built-in bookcases and bead boarding added a coziness to the space while granite countertops, a tile backsplash and a new sink dressed up the outdated kitchen. The Designing Dreams team was creative in using much of what the family had, such as painting the existing kitchen cabinets and adding new hardware, repainting their kitchen island chairs and reupholstering

some of their furniture as well as painting the walls and fireplace to create a fresh, new look.

And then came the accessories — window treatments, lighting, pillows and a brand new flat screen television and console. The transformation was complete and the family was in awe at what good design can do.

"Allison took a lot of stuff we had in the house and made it look amazing. There was a 'wow' factor for people walking into this house that have been on this road with us," Angie said. "People closest to us knew what a weight this has been on Joe because he is such a handy guy. Now that it's done, we have the time to spend with Olivia."

And as for Angie's favorite part of the redesign?

"The kitchen is a joy to work in now, where before it was just a kitchen, now it feels like part of our home," Angie remarked. "The wood floor, because of Olivia's situation, has made all the difference in the world in helping to keep it clean and keep contaminants and contagions down to a minimum. When you have a kid

with cancer there are obviously a lot of things to clean up, and when you are steam cleaning a carpet over and over, there is only so much we could do. This flooring has really been the most life changing; it's an anxiety release because I worried so much about her system deficiencies. Now I don't freak out when she gets on the floor with her train and scoots all around because I know the floor is clean."

And you might think Joe would love the new flat screen, but while he admits it's pretty cool, that's not his favorite. "It's a lovely TV, but I like the fireplace, because I worked hard to get that operable prior to [the redesign] and it looks fantastic. It's definitely been a life-changing event, very much so. We are so more far ahead than we thought we'd be."

The entire experience, even the contractors working on the heart of their home, was a joy. "We've met some truly amazing people through all of this," Angie added. "The vendors were amazing, they came in and were so concerned about taking care of [Olivia] and not being in the way, and how can we help you. We never once had any issues, and it was just a pleasure."

The redesign has really improved the quality of their lives, both physically and emotionally. It really opened up a whole new world for them.

"Our initial thought was to do the bedroom, but the bedroom wouldn't have made the largest impact on our family and we have our friends over now, and we've become way more social because we are proud of our home," Angie added.

And that's exactly what Todd hoped would happen.

"When the family described this event as being 'life changing,' I knew that we had achieved what we set out to do, namely to provide them with an interior environment beyond their wildest dreams," Todd said. "The whole reason behind creating this foundation was our strong belief in how impactful an individual's interior environment can have on their entire well being. It's so

important for all of us to have a 'sanctuary' to retreat to when life hits us with unexpected challenges."

Princess Olivia's Grand Entrance

Olivia, now nearly 6 years old, is a bundle of energy when she bounces into her new family room dispensing hugs with wishes for everyone to have a Merry Christmas. You would never guess a child so full of effervescent joy would be battling a disease the strongest among us fear. It's no wonder they nicknamed her princess, as she



Allison and Olivia

■ Designing Dreams

can work the room like a reigning queen.

As she poses for the family photo in her new home, she exclaims, “Wait a minute, I need my Cinderella lipstick,” before scurrying back to her bedroom.

Her parents explain she was awe-struck when she first saw the new look. I later learned from the family that she had very limited verbal skills before being diagnosed with cancer, but once they removed the golf ball-sized tumor from her brain, her language has exploded and she has been talking non-stop ever since, creating an unexpected miracle from such a dire diagnosis.

Luckily, Olivia is doing extremely well and is nearing completion of her chemotherapy. So far, there has been no more recurrence of the cancer.

When she finishes her last round of chemotherapy, it’s nice to know they will have a wonderful new home environment to recuperate and rejuvenate, thanks to Designing Dreams.

“I have completed thousands of room makeovers in my years in the business and this was by far the most rewarding experience I have ever had,” concluded Todd, who gave Olivia a big bear hug. “Not only knowing that we were really able to make a difference in the family’s life but also receiving the overwhelming support from local businesses and individuals we had approached to contribute their time and resources. This was a financially challenging year for many of these businesses but everyone stepped up without any hesitation to help make this project a huge success. It was great to see how well the entire Designing Dreams Team worked together.” **PN**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Designing Dreams

www.designingdreams.org

Learn more about Olivia’s journey to recovery at
<http://www.caringbridge.org/visit/oliviawampler>