

# INSIDE RADIO

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## Les Has More

by Mike Kinosian, Personality Editor

If your television remote has a tendency to frequently land on TLC, there's an excellent chance you've seen **Leslie Segrete** on one of that cable channel's most popular "Life Unscripted" offerings - the Emmy-nominated "While You Were Out."

A fascination to create and craft things has underscored the life of the former Art Director of "The Rikki Lake Show" from literally her earliest recollections.

While most people's area of expertise is limited to one or two areas, it seems this zestful and instantly likeable New Yorker's skills are borderless.

Radio was added to her expansive resume three months ago (2-12-2005), when she joined Tom Kraeutler as co-host of "The Money Pit."

### Intriguing Opportunity

Approximately 120 terrestrial stations and the two satcasters carry the Squeaky Door Productions' two-hour weekend feature, which has proven to be a great education in radio production for Segrete. "Tom is such a great guy and has established an amazing team," she states. "I've learned from people calling in about ventilation and cracked foundations and am now the most paranoid homeowner in America. My background is aesthetics and furniture construction - not what's going on behind drywall. He's opened my eyes to this in a good way - as well as in a very bad way."

An NBC-TV producer friend of Segrete's, Hank Mendheim, constantly monitors different media-related websites. "He came across an ad that said a company was looking for someone for a lifestyle program for all types of media," she recounts. "He e-mailed me the clipping and I thought it seemed like an interesting idea."

But the decorator/designer/carpenter/seamstress was on the road at the time and her press materials and show reels were at home. "I called my husband [Ed] and the two of us were on the phone forever," the incessantly upbeat Segrete recalls. "We finally put everything together and he had my materials [sent by messenger] the next day. I heard from Tom that evening. It seemed like it was kismet."

### No Exceptions

It's understandable if someone were to think "The Money Pit"

was a show about finances rather than home improvement, but as Segrete explains, "Tom makes it very clear in all intros that a person's home is an absorption of funds. There are problems or design/decoration issues that you want to keep changing and it ends up sucking up every dime."

Even the show's new co-host isn't immune to the high cost of home ownership. "My husband and I recently crossed the first year threshold of being in our home," notes Segrete, who in 1999 designed and maintained window and in-store displays at Giorgio Armani/New York City. "As I was going over receipts to do our taxes, I was dumbfounded at the amount of money we've put into this house. Just because I work in this industry doesn't mean everything in my house is touched by gold and works perfectly. It's almost the opposite."

Workingwomen constitute a significant percentage of the labor force, of course, but there are also many cases where females are at home throughout the day. "They're aware of problems and become a little more paranoid about what they see," contends Segrete, who succeeds Debby Robinson as "Money Pit" co-host. "I encourage them to call and take part in the experience so we can all learn about something together."

### Constant Learning Experience

A home inspector by trade, Kraeutler possesses a vast amount of home improvement knowledge and Segrete proudly proclaims, "No matter what someone calls in about, he'll have an answer. If he doesn't, hopefully, I will. Listeners end [their calls] by saying they love us and we're helping them. We have dedicated listeners who constantly learn something new."

Callers thus far haven't generally mentioned Segrete's TLC credits, giving the 2000 French Culinary Institute graduate reason to speculate, "I'm still not so sure if they're familiar with who I am. If they don't know my name, they might put it together by [seeing my picture] on the website and in the newsletter."

### Show's Foundation

Rather than wanting to know how to do something, "Money Pit" listeners usually prefer product recommendations or how to deal with their contractor. "The two of us offer an experience and intelligence that makes it easily understandable and encourages the audience to take part in it," Segrete remarks.

Many queries are fielded regarding foundation problems, which she explains is moisture-related. "That's what happens when gutters aren't draining properly," Segrete points out. "We've received many questions about tile work and roof damage from [hurricane-ravaged] Florida. We're surprised when we get a flooring question from Florida that involves hardwood because it's so out of character for the region. You get tossed a few

surprises, but most of the time, people tend to call about seasonal issues. But even if it's a similar question, there's a different answer because of unique conditions."

#### **Early Reluctance**

There's much fondness and respect in Segrete's heart for her father, Dominick, who passed away in May 2004. Although Leslie wasn't particularly drawn to the medium, Dominick was a big Talk radio fan.

The week before Leslie got married (about four years ago), she and Dominick were at a little clam bar on the East end of Long Island, where a local radio station was doing a remote. "My father wanted so much for me to talk on this radio show," remarks Segrete, who was Art Director for the Oxygen Network at the time, but wasn't on camera then as she is now on TLC. "I was behind-the-scenes and a little shy. When the guy put the microphone in my hand, I realized the show was his livelihood and I better be 'on.' I know somewhere my dad is listening to 'The Money Pit' and is enjoying it greatly."

Radio hadn't been something three-year "While You Were Out" veteran Segrete thought about, largely because she was unaware there were home improvement-themed talk shows. "When this [opportunity] came my way, it seemed like a good fit," she remarks. "It's almost like establishing myself as a brand and I'm glad to have it. There are so many different television programs on home improvement and home design. We have no idea where this is all going."

#### **Basement Bantering**

Friendly, cohesive on-air bantering and interaction exists between Kraeutler and Segrete, which is noteworthy because he's in New Jersey and she's in New York and the two don't see each other. "We don't want to step on each other's words or [be redundant] with the same advice," she remarks. "While we're on the ISDN line, we're Online with each other and with the producer in the studio. If someone has a point they want to make, we have to pay attention to all these different screens. It's kind of strange to sit in my office and talk to nobody. I have to stifle the Italian in me. As I speak, I gesture with my hands and slap the microphone a lot."

Having never heard "The Money Pit" before being named the show's co-host, Segrete had no pre-conceived notions about it

or what to expect with her partner. "He's a genuinely nice guy who really cares about his business and wants everyone to feel comfortable and perform to his or her best abilities," she says glowingly of Kraeutler, who's done the show the past nine years. "He really has it down to a [science]. Whenever we have a free [moment], we stock phone calls and answer people's home improvement questions. He schedules all the other recordings for times when I'm home. We're still finding out a little bit about each other."

Radio show taping is done around Segrete's TLC schedule, with her input coming via a recording studio set up in her basement office. "I'm usually home one week a month – sometimes less," she explains. "We'll do two or three shows at that time. It's almost like a television program. Tom pre-produces it and does all the wraparounds and calls, and then programs the show."

#### **Designing Woman**

There's considerable yearly travel associated with the "While You Were Out" grind, which consists of doing four shows in 15 different locations. "The people who drive the truck and trailer across the country get home half as much as we do," Segrete explains. "I enjoy [doing that show] because we make a difference. Sometimes it's as small as changing aesthetics to as big as reuniting families or doing something for charity. It's not going to be forever, so it's something to take advantage of right now. Thank goodness supportive people surround me and are willing to take this ride with me."

Since "The Money Pit" isn't live, the co-hosts aren't kept to a strict schedule. "Much like television, radio is a very small family industry," Segrete offers. "Everyone knows each other and it's very tightly networked. It's all about being friendly; doing a good job; and being recommended for your next job."

If you were to ask Segrete three years ago to name her greatest professional love, the answer would've been set design. Today's reply would most likely be theater and television. "I enjoy nothing more than creating an environment for the audience to partake in, whether it's conveying a scene or emotion that a playwright has written or encouraging a conversation area for a talk show," she comments. "First and foremost – I consider myself a designer."

#### **Honest Input**

Prior to her fifth birthday, Segrete had already been taught how to sew by her mother and by age nine was working at her



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father's interior design firm. "It was just so interesting to be around color, design, carpet and fabric samples and creative people," she comments.

Although a Drama major, Segrete's focus was set design, so her degree from Long Island's Hofstra University is in Drama & Set Design. "In addition to my design [courses], I also wanted to take a couple of performance classes," she explains. "I was terrible in my first acting classes. I was nervous and awkward and couldn't be myself. Midway through the semester, my professor said he heard I was pretty good in design and suggested that's what I should focus on. I was heartbroken, but realistically, I thought I could do something I was good at."

Learning about people and their history prompted her to minor in Anthropology. "That only helps me to understand nuances of design and why people think the way they do," Segrete notes. "It took me to a one-week internship at the Museum of Natural History in New York after my freshman year."

#### **Eye-Opening View Of University Life**

Recently honored as Hofstra's Young Alumni Of The Year, Segrete declares, "I showed them that I could not only excel in what I was good at, but I also excelled in all [other] aspects."

The award ceremony was on a Friday night and Segrete was asked to judge homecoming floats the following day. "Fraternities, sororities and sports teams are the ones who [participate]," the former "Good Morning America" food stylist and prep cook notes. "Saturday of homecoming [coincides] with the first opening of the main stage production at the Crawford Playhouse, so I never even knew we had a homecoming, football team or parade. It was amazing to see that whole other aspect of university life; I had no idea."

#### **A Good Thing Gets Better**

Given Segrete's numerous talents, it's only natural to invoke Martha Stewart's name and it just so happens that one of Camp Cupcake's most famous detainees is an idol of hers. "Even with everything that's gone on, I still adore her," Segrete remarks of the former 55170-054. "She's just brilliant, but got the short end of the stick. I love the way she presents all her projects and am interested to see how her new post-prison shows will look. It may have humbled her in a way that could make her more appealing to people who thought she was a bit stuck up."

Despite what critics and detractors say, it's clear Stewart is a woman who knows what she likes and Segrete asserts, "Thank goodness for it; otherwise, the brand wouldn't be as popular. She gets misconstrued as the 'b' word because she knows how to achieve what she wants. It's important to her to keep that brand looking the way it does. If not, there is no brand. If she's a little pushy or energetic in her creativity and enforcing her beliefs, so be it."

#### **Too Perfect**

Intrigued with the concept of CBS-TV's "Wickedly Perfect," Segrete watched one episode of the Joan Lunden-hosted series, but notes, "I'm almost a non-reality television watcher just because that's my lifestyle. It's crazy enough for me to live with reality TV.

So many people consider themselves creative divas and it gave them an opportunity to showcase their skills."

But it also made it a little too competitive. "They were trying to 'Martha Stewart it' a little bit too much," Segrete opines. "I'm very interested to see what the Martha Stewart ['Apprentice' spin-off show will be like]. I'll be desperately trying to get on it as one of the competitors."

#### **Tribute To Her Hero**

Fellow "While You Were Out" designer John Bruce and Segrete collaborated on their first retail space for Christopher's Fine Foods in Napa, CA.

This is especially significant to Segrete since her father was in interior architecture and did retail spaces. "We got the project shortly before he passed away," she says with her voice starting to crack. "He was with us every step of the way, going over our designs and helping us make the right decisions. The fact he was so supportive and encouraging in this project and got to see it to its final completion was [so important] to me. My career came full circle to where I started with him and he knew he was my biggest hero."

#### **Fearless Female**

The next career step for Segrete is writing "Fear Not! You Can Reupholster Anything," a "How To" book that's due out the end of this year. "It's daunting because it's a tremendous amount of textual pages," says the author, who also contributes as a "House Beautiful" writer. "I'm not professionally trained as an upholsterer, but have done it the past 12 years. I've figured out how to do it from a regular person's standpoint - not someone who does it as their trade. I'm a creative person who is thrilled to have a job that allows me to use my hands every day. When I was growing up, I always said I wanted to make things. It amazes me that, in my 30 years of life, I've figured it out and am doing it."

A longtime fan of the writing process, she hints more books may be in the offing. "I'm hoping that, in the next few years, I won't travel as much so my husband and I can have a family of our own," Segrete notes. "All these opportunities coming my way are things I've never thought about or dreamed of. The future is mine and I'm glad to [seize] it."



**WHO: Leslie Segrete**

**WHAT: Co-Host "The Money Pit"**

**WHERE: Squeaky Door Productions**

**WHEN: Various weekend times (2hrs)**

**HOW MANY AFFILIATES:**

**Approximately 120 terrestrial stations; also Sirius and XM**

**HOW LONG: Since Feb. 12, 2005**

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