

it's all about the e's

ANOTHER IN A SERIES OF PROFILES OF LEXINGTON'S OUTSTANDING ENTREPRENEURS

After 10 years, Smiley Pete Owners Still Deliver

By Gina Greathouse and Dean Harvey

You can learn a lot about what brings a neighborhood together by delivering its pizzas.

After spending their college years as fraternity brothers at UK, Chuck Creacy and Chris Eddie, the founders of Smiley Pete Publishing, found themselves ringing doorbells in the Chevy Chase area, delivering orders for Domino's.

They were looking for little more than a paycheck and some generous tips. What they found was a local business opportunity.

The neighborhoods they visited had a remarkable sense of identity, Creacy and Eddie said, with residents who shared strikingly similar lifestyles, interests and aspirations. All they were missing was a magazine to pull them together.

This month, that magazine, Chevy Chaser, is celebrating its tenth anniversary, having become the flagship of a growing family of four local publications, each of which has found a successful niche in the local publishing market. Southsider Magazine is targeted to residents in the southern portion of Fayette County along Man O' War Boulevard, Business Lexington covers business and economic issues across Central Kentucky, and W Weekly features regular arts and entertainment coverage in Fayette County and across the region.

Not bad for two entrepreneurs who admit they began with no business plan, no corporate structure, no checking account, no office space, and not even a computer.

What they did have was a powerful determination to succeed.

"We just wanted to do something, anything, to get away from delivering those pizzas," Eddie said.

"So," Creacy added with a smile, "we decided we'd publish a neighborhood newspaper, the Chevy Chaser. ... We and a bunch of wonderful friends ended up hand-delivering the first 15,000 of them, door-to-door, ourselves."

Shortly after the first issue was distributed, the buzz began — some of it positive, and some not so much. Creacy remembered that some people thought the pair would "defame the name of the Chevy Chase area" because they were neophytes in the newspaper business. Others, however, immediately understood and appreciated the value of such a publication and offered help to the duo in the form of paid advertising support, space for an office, a loaned computer, boxed lunches, a phone — and lots of encouragement.

After the third issue, ad revenues started to grow, but it took a full year before they abandoned their door-to-door delivery system and began mailing the free monthly publication through the U.S. Post Office.

Four years into the venture, with a fledgling staff in place and ad revenues continuing to escalate, Smiley Pete Publishing launched The Southsider, a monthly paper to cover news and features in the area beyond Chevy Chase — along Bates Creek Road, and spanning from the Hartland area to Versailles Road. Like the original Chevy Chaser, Southsider was welcomed because, as Creacy explained, "It filled a niche that other local sources didn't, or couldn't."

Throughout their 10-year history in the publishing business, both Creacy and Eddie have been driven by a shared desire to justify the faith that so many others have shown over the years in them and their company.

"Literally hundreds of folks were, and still are, instrumental in our successes, and we weren't about to betray their trust and encouragement," Creacy said.

And so, when friends began suggesting that there might be room for a Lexington-based business news publication, the two began to consider yet another leap into the unknown with the launch of Business Lexington.

"We did our homework," Creacy said. "We went to business execs, and asked 'What do you want to see?' and 'Where are the interesting stories nobody has covered?' We got a ton of great feedback, and now we're publishing a cool little newspaper that covers companies doing business around the corner, and around the world."

Shortly afterward, Creacy and Eddie had the opportunity to add a weekly arts and entertainment publication to the fold, another long-time business goal, by purchasing the free local magazine Wildcat Weekly. The pair renamed the publication W Weekly and expanded its coverage and distribution to serve the city's growing number of young professionals, as well as other readers interested in the local arts and entertainment scene.

The parent company formed by Creacy and Eddie, Smiley Pete Publishing (named for a legendary dog who frequented Lexington's downtown businesses in the 1950s) has 17 full-time employees and big plans for the future. Creacy and Eddie are still good friends as well as business partners. They share a deep and abiding respect for the profession they're in, and for the acceptance their enterprises have felt within the community.

"We learn something new and different every day," Creacy noted.

"And every day," Eddie added, "We're thrilled not to be delivering pizza."

Gina Greathouse of Commerce Lexington and Dean Harvey of UK's Innovation and Commercialization Center collaborate as members of the Bluegrass Business Development Partnership to promote and support new and existing businesses in Central Kentucky. Contact them at (859)225-5005.



> If you know of other entrepreneurial, e-type ventures in the Lexington area that deserve to be featured in this series, please email Gina Greathouse at ggreathouse@commercelexington.com.