



Doug and Kendra Akers

Leesburg, Florida



Akers Media Group, Inc

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Doug and Kendra Akers:

A week before Doug and Kendra Akers were set to deliver the first issue of their brand-new magazine in 2008, the stock market crashed. After having “borrowed money up to our eyeballs,” Doug says, they faced the stark realization that they were starting a business during a recession.

This was a stressful time that resulted in many sleepless nights.

But with a strong concept, the relationships and trust Kendra had built during 10 years in advertising sales in the publishing industry, and with vice president of sales, Tim McRae’s successful track record, Doug and Kendra remained confident and committed to pursuing their dream.

“It’s very important to go into your venture knowing and believing that failure is not an option,” Doug says. “We worked every day and every weekend for the first two years. We even delivered our own magazines

out of the back of our Toyota 4Runner. We worked hard and there was absolutely no way we were giving up.”

The result of the couple’s hard work is that Akers Media and Healthy Living magazine celebrated their 10th anniversaries in 2018. Doug and Kendra had fulfilled a goal that was set over a bottle of wine.

When Doug relocated from Tampa to Lake County in 1993, he had just graduated from nursing school. His first 16 years in Lake County were spent working as a RN health-care administrator. Kendra worked in advertising sales for newspapers and other city regional publications.

“She was good at what she did, but wasn’t happy at her current job,” Doug says. “One night, while sitting on the back porch sharing a bottle of wine, I asked her if she could do anything with her life, what would it be. She said, ‘I’d start my own magazine.’ I responded and said, ‘Let’s do it.’”

Combining Doug’s health-care background and Kendra’s knowledge of publishing, the couple brainstormed and came up with the idea for a magazine about healthy living. Lake County had lifestyle magazines, but Doug and Kendra identified a gap in the market for a magazine that touched all aspects of people’s lives.

“When we launched Healthy Living, we based it on four pillars: physical, mental, financial, and spiritual health,” Doug says. “The magazine represents a balance of all four. If you achieve a balance, you’re more likely to live a healthy lifestyle. With everything that happened in 2008, our publication was a beacon of hope. We told stories of people overcoming financial struggles, illness, and drug addiction. It truly was a motivational product in the market at the right time.”

The couple changed their lives, professionally and personally, to make the business work.

“Kendra quit her job to focus exclusively on the new business,” Doug says. “I started part-time, helping on nights and weekends, before joining full-time a couple years later. We sold our house and invested everything we had in the business. We were all in. Failure was never an option for us.”

Businesses and organizations, including Florida Hospital Waterman (now AdventHealth Waterman), liked the Healthy Living concept and believed in what the couple were doing enough to sign on for the magazine’s launch. As a city regional publication, the magazine was delivered to Lake and Sumter Counties and The Villages.

Akers Media expanded quickly.

“After launching our initial title in 2008, we started V-Life magazine a year later. This was geared towards people living in The Villages,” Doug says. “In October of 2010, we acquired Lake and Sumter Style magazine. With the three products growing at a good rate, I felt comfortable leaving my day job and joining the business full-time.”

The company developed a bold new approach in 2011. Clients regularly asked Doug and Kendra whether they did brochures, logos, websites, and other traditional and digital marketing services, so they decided to start doing this work themselves instead of outsourcing it. Their first project, a rebranding effort for a local salon, was a success, and in

January 2012, the couple officially formed a full-service advertising agency.

“We added staff, took over two adjacent office suites and, between 2010 and 2013, saw a tremendous amount of growth with that business,” Doug says. “Many of our clients that were advertising in our magazines needed websites, marketing, and social media services. As a result, we had built-in referral sources and experienced a lot of organic growth.”

One of the biggest challenges Akers Media has faced in the past five years is the mindset that print is dead. Akers’ goal is to produce unique, award-winning print content that can’t be found anywhere else. Lake and Sumter residents don’t have many places to turn to for relevant local content, and Doug believes print is enjoying a revival—the human experience of engaging with a printed piece is much different than engaging with a digital piece.

Through riveting content and community-specific information, Akers Media remains firmly committed to print and maintaining its status as one of the premier city regional publications in the state of Florida. Factor in a fast-growing social media presence and the company’s engagement with readers is stronger than ever.

Doug and Kendra also realize the importance of getting involved and giving back to their community. Last year, the company’s charitable contributions were close to \$100,000. “That’s something we’re extremely proud of,” Doug says.

Despite many obstacles, Doug and Kendra have succeeded by following through on their initial instincts.

“Through our magazines, we meet a lot of unique people,” Doug says. “We met the founder of Kettle One Vodka and did a story on him. Much like what we did, he said, ‘Find a hole and fill it.’ We looked at the landscape of the magazine industry and didn’t see a magazine like the one we wanted to publish. We identified the gap and filled it.”

Since 2008, each year, Healthy Living Magazine has been voted as one of Florida’s Best Overall magazines by the Florida Magazine Association.

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