On the Road Again

Couple meets later in life and jumps into marriage and business with both feet.

"We have the pleasure of spending more time getting to know each other, making up for lost time as we met so late in life," Linda says.

Article Alicia McGarry | Photography Angela C. Bond

Many a married couple fantasize about one day working together by owning a business and living the dream. For those couples, the numbers bode well: more than 90 percent of small businesses in the U.S. are family owned, and, some of the world's biggest companies—like Cisco—are husband-and-wife operated.

Pat and Linda Casey's love story doesn't follow the traditional, nuclear, paradigm. They weren't high-school sweethearts or betrothed by way of college. The Caseys met at a divorce support group, through a mutual friend. And, in an aww-worthy instance of what both Linda and Pat feel was true destiny, he was there just starting his classes, while she just so happened to attend the one he was at, having missed her first class.

Maybe that's why owning Premier Coach Services LLC together has been such a rewarding experience for both Linda and Pat.

"We have the pleasure of spending more time getting to know each other, making up for lost time as we met so late in life," she says.

The Casey's love story proves that sometimes, love is better the second time around, just as their career paths also took them on other adventures before arriving at Pat and Linda's favorite professional destination yet: CEO and president of Premier Coach Services LLC in Riverside, Mo.

Before opening Premier Coach Services in 2001, Pat owned an over-the-road truck and trailer repair shop at the same location, called MFS Pro Truck & Trailer Repair, that he began more than 25 years ago.

However, the deregulated freight rates knocked many small trucking companies out of business. The sharp decline in trucking businesses funneled down to adversely affect Pat's repair shop's bottom line.

Rather than shutter his shop and close the doors for good, Pat decided to take another road: transform his shop into an RV service center. Not only did the large shop in the back of the building lend itself to accommodating large RVs, trailers and the like, the diesel mechanics on staff found the professional progression a natural one, as well.

Immediately following the business' transformation, consumers had also begun looking to other modes of transportation beyond flying after 9/11, which not only caused airline ticket prices to skyrocket, but also, took a great deal of fun out of getting there—which should, of course, be half the fun.

Premier Coaching Services continued to grow and has today become not only a full-service RV dealership, but also a place to rent, store and service RVs, as well.

Of course, owning a small business devoted to recreation in an economy that leaves little room in most families' budget for even the most cost-effective forms of fun has also proven challenging for its own reasons.

"The most significant thing that has affected our business over the past four years is the tightening of bank credit," Pat says.

"People who would have normally qualified for a loan can no longer get one, and as a result, we have lost sales simply because we couldn't get them financed," he continues.

Then again, adds Linda, this is a reason why being a small business owner can actually serve to benefit.

"Because we are a small company, we have the ability to quickly alter our business model," she says.

"As a result, we have evolved Premier's business model by adding different segments—some suggested by our customers—like storage, RV rental deliveries, long-term RV rentals and even a camping club," she says.

With more than 130 members, Premier's camping club offers anyone interested the opportunity to communally camp out with other RV aficionados at a beautiful locale, most recently, Lake Paradise Resort, in Lone Jack. Mo.

And therein lies what Linda says is, by far, the most rewarding part of her profession—aside from working with the love of her life.

"I absolutely love helping our clients have a wonderful RVing experience—whether they are buying, renting or attending one of our campouts," she says. "Everyone becomes part of our family."

Finding creative ways to keep America's RV tradition relevant in today's tech-crazy, breakneck-paced world is an opportunity Linda says she also appreciates.

"While my degree is in Finance and Economics, I have a creative side as well," Linda says.

"I enjoy handling all of our advertising, social media and our website," she adds.

For Pat, the most rewarding part of working with his wife is knowing that, no matter what, the support is there.

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"I know that my back is always covered—every decision that we make, we make together," he says.

Of course, the other side of that is that, because every decision about the their business is one made in tandem, that makes for a lot of conversations that revolve around the business, sometimes leaving little time for much else.

Both Linda and Pat agree that the most challenging part of working together is separating the personal life from the business.

"Separating work life from home life is definitely the hardest part—we end up talking about the business most of the time," Linda says.

"Trying to take my wife out for a romantic dinner," Pat says. "I'd say that's probably the hardest part."

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