



THE KISS

BY MARY CATHERINE COOLIDGE PHOTOS BY LYNN ELKES

BRIAN AND SHARON EHRlich DEVELOPED ONLINE CONNECTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY THEY LOVE.

CREATING COMMUNITY ... AS A COUPLE

Brian and Sharon Ehrlich believe in communities. Small, big, on the Internet, in person. Doesn't seem to matter what form it comes in, but community – connecting with people who share common interests – is central to their lives together as a couple.

And that's one of the reasons they moved to Sarasota five years ago from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – the community. "We've really fallen in love with this town," Brian says. "It's big enough that it has all the amenities, but there's still that small town feel."

That mix of big city thrill, small town feel, is not the only reason the Ehrlichs settled in Sarasota in 2003. It was, in part, to be close to Brian's dad, Ted, who lives nearby in Ft. Myers. Brian, who had just completed his MBA, would be working with his Dad running a carpet cleaning business for large apartment complexes.

That business, thriving in 2003, suffered some setbacks along with the recent real estate downturn. But Brian, with a true entrepreneurial spirit, was not daunted. He says, "I looked at the expense of advertising...and I thought, 'There's got to be a better way.'" That's when he decided to see how the Internet could be leveraged.

Brian and his Dad began conceptualizing a Website where service providers – everyone from soccer coaches to doctors, plumbers, handymen (and -women), and of course, carpet cleaners – could post a provider profile at a low annual cost and be seen by an unending supply of Internet users throughout southwest Florida.

Sharon describes the site – perfectly named as "honeydo.com" – as "sort of like eBay for services." She says, "It's really for anybody who needs to get stuff done and needs to find somebody else to do it." That may range from finding the perfect math tutor for Tommy to finding someone to take care of the family dog during a vacation. In other words, honeydo.com is a community – an online community where vendors and consumers can meet and do business.

Along with some background data from Experian, users have the ability to post online ratings of their satisfaction level after hiring a particular provider, giving new users of the site a solid sense of who they might want to call. It's "especially good for newcomers to the area," says Sharon – those folks who might not have a clue who to call for lawn maintenance, for example.

But honeydo.com is not the first Ehrlich Internet brainchild. In March, the Ehrlichs also launched the increasingly popular Sarasotalocal.com – a Website which Brian describes as "a com-

BRIAN PULLED OFF A ROMANTIC COUP THAT NOW WOMAN COULD RESIST AND SEALED THEIR DESTINY AS A COUPLE.



munity for the community, dedicated to the people and places specific to Sarasota.”

“We didn’t start Sarasotalocal.com with a financial goal in mind,” Brian says. It started as just a fun way to connect with other people in Sarasota.

Sarasotalocal.com attracts a diversity of users, Sharon says. “We have all types of groups within the site – Mommy groups, professionals, pet lovers, the Junior League, realtors, even a recipe-sharing group. The blogs on Sarasotalocal.com are a big hit, Brian says, because “people love to be heard,” and the site gives them a safe, friendly forum for exchanging news and opinions.

The site requires that users register – a tactic to keep the site “honest,” Brian says, but everyone is welcome to join. With 400 registered members, Brian predicts the site will continue to grow in size and relevance for the Sarasota community.

There’s that word again ... community.

And, no surprise, the Ehrlichs are working at creating yet another community – this one a bit more private: Sharon gave birth to a little boy, Cameron, in 2007, and their community of three may expand still further. “We definitely would like to have more children,” she says.

The Ehrlichs began, though, as a community of two, way back in school. Though they first met in seventh grade, it wasn’t until their senior year of high school that Brian and Sharon began dating.

“We ran in different circles of friends until then,” Sharon says. But by the 12th grade, they had friends in common and found themselves hanging out in groups together more and more. They continued dating right into college, but attended different schools. In fact, they spent a couple of years dating other people, but again, by their senior year – this time of college – they were back together.

“Sharon always said she felt we’d get back together – that we had ‘unfinished business,’” Brian says. But though back together, they lived and worked in separate cities – Sharon in Washington, D.C., and Brian moving several times for his work in and out of cities ranging from Charlotte to Buffalo.

But then Brian pulled off a romantic coup that no woman could resist and sealed their destiny as a couple with...a marriage proposal.

One night in 2001, Brian took Sharon to one of the best restaurants in Pittsburgh, where he’d collaborated with the maitre d’ to create a special one-of-a-kind menu.

When the menus were brought to the table, however, Sharon didn’t notice anything different. She was intent on picking out her entrée, and it wasn’t until Brian pressed her to pick out a little something to whet their appetite, that she glanced back at the listing of appetizers. There, nestled between the lines reading “Lobster Rolls” and “Escargot” was a line that stopped Sharon in her tracks: a line that read “Sharon, will you marry me?”

And in the split second it took her to realize what was happening, she saw her soon-to-be-husband bending down on one knee in front of her.

Of course she said “Yes,” and of course the other diners clapped, and of course the maitre d’ brought champagne.

And of course, the first thing they did when they left the restaurant – as they toured around Pittsburgh in a limousine, listening to a CD compilation of special songs that Brian had made just for the occasion – was start dialing up their family and friends on their cell phone and sharing the good news that they were engaged.

Already creating their first community...as a couple.

WWW.HONEYDO.COM
WWW.SARASOTALOCAL.COM