

EXECUTIVE SUITE



Wendy W. Kershner, principal of Axia Marketing

Master Marketer

Wendy Kershner of Axia Marketing

By Terry Scott Reed

If you've ever entertained childhood thoughts of running away to join the circus, you'll envy Wendy Kershner, the owner of Axia Marketing in West Reading. She not only did that, but did it with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, no less! Far up the ladder from following elephants with a shovel, Wendy was publications director. In her current home office near the Reading Hospital on a quiet side street, mementos of her time

there abound, including Ringling coffee cups and some of her notable print pieces, framed and hanging on the walls.

So-called dream jobs are just that—the stuff of daydreams during a bad day at work. Let's be frank: While we might dislike some aspects of our present daily grind, I don't think any of us expects to be called upon to replace George Steinbrenner or Lance Armstrong. How, then, do we explain Wendy's penchant for landing multiple dream jobs?

Her résumé reeks with marquee names—really—Disney, Radio City Music Hall, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Madison Square Garden,... and more. Those past employers and clients that aren't directly involved in show business are still significant as Fortune 500 companies and as innovators, such as the Vanguard Group and Aetna.

No one could succeed in all those roles unless one was rare—someone with both high artistic skills and a strong business component. (Those

stereotypical models of the artist as a poor business person and the accountant who is uncomfortable away from the predictable world of numbers were born somewhere! You get one or you get the other, it seems.)

Wendy, who grew up in West Reading just a few blocks from her present home, was probably predestined for her career, even though she might not have realized it back then. During her time at Wyomissing High School, she was

an art major and played field hockey, tennis, and track (high jump, 2-mile relay). She earned a BA in fine arts from Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut. "I wanted a small school and a small city. My father went to school in New England. Hartford offered everything you could want, but I didn't get swallowed up by a big school or a big city. And Hartford had good internship opportunities and also lots of volunteer opportunities too.

"When I graduated, I still wasn't sure what I wanted to do! I had interest in architecture and certainly pursued that interest in studies and undergraduate work, but I got hired by what was known then as a "prep house" in Boston, prepping magazines for production. I was hired as a customer service rep on a new magazine—*PC*, a Ziff Davis monthly that was going to go weekly as *PC Week*. I didn't make a lot of money, so I ate a lot of free food at happy hours and relied on friends to sometimes buy me a drink!

"That put me on a path in publishing and enabled me to move to New York City, where I became production manager on a publication called *Manhattan Inc.*, which was owned by the owner of *Philadelphia* magazine and *Boston* magazine." Wendy transitioned to advertising with a stint at the New York City ad agency that did "probably 80 to 90 percent of the advertising for Broadway and Off-Broadway shows. I loved that work. I'm in awe of the creative process, and this took me behind the scenes!

"We created print ads, posters, and so forth, and handled things like opening-night invitations. It was very fast-paced, quick to change, and stimulating work." The exposure didn't spoil show business for her, but rather it has made her a follower of live performing.

That led to her move to Philadelphia where she worked for Aetna and later Vanguard group as director of marketing and communications for both organizations. "I managed around 30 to 35 people plus freelancers, and it was a rewarding experience watching people grow and develop professionally."

Her personal reading habits at present alternate between books and magazines. "I won't 'always renew' anything. I subscribe to several magazines for a while, and

then I feel like my book reading is suffering, so I don't renew my subscriptions and I concentrate on books for a while, and then I swing back."

Charitable work, the giveback, is something Wendy grew up with and something she engaged in everywhere she has lived and worked. Her parents were both active. Her mother, who lost a battle with breast cancer, helped start the breast cancer support services group in Berks, and Wendy continues to volunteer with them. She also helps out at Berks Women in Crisis, and she's on the board of the Friends of the Conrad Weiser Homestead. She also helps the DAR to promote patriotism.

"It's so satisfying coming back to Berks and helping some of the historical associations. My grandparents lived in Womelsdorf, so helping out at the Conrad Weiser homestead ties in to my father's childhood."

Wendy is also working with a group that wants to establish a

mural arts program in Reading that is similar to the successful program in Philadelphia. A recent passion emerged as she now helps clients to create corporate archives. Many companies have a wonderful history and great documentation filed away. I am working with the Berks County Bar Association. They have photographs of the old courthouse, past presidents of the group, and other things hidden in a closet, and we're getting stuff framed and on display. We began with a "past presidents" exhibit with photographs of the association's past leaders.

"I also enjoy coaching and mentoring other women, especially if they are new to business."

Her return to Berks brings a perspective: "This community has so many things to do, it's amazing! I suppose sometimes you have to leave to appreciate what's here. There's such a rich diverse offering here. You don't have to go to Philadelphia for all this stuff, but you still have that option,

and New York and Baltimore and Washington, D.C., as well!"

Besides her marketing career and community involvement, Wendy is an active fine artist, producing collages and prints among other things. She exhibits her work in Reading, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., but you can see examples of her work online at www.axia-marketing.com/about/wwkfineart.

The stereotype is that folks who work in chocolate factories will wrinkle up their noses when offered candy that's a treat for the rest of us. Wendy's time on Broadway and at Ringling hasn't jaded her about performances or circuses, either. She's a big fan, especially of the Cirque du Soliel shows, having seen some of their Las Vegas iterations and others. "They perform at a really high level." She's looking forward to the Reading stop of Cirque's show *Dralion*, scheduled for the Sovereign Center in November. And she doesn't have to leave Reading ...



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