

The Rae and Rose Story: 10 Years of Bliss, Stress and Success!



Ten years is a long time to enjoy your job. Or your spouse, for that matter. But Rose Middleton and Rae Person have more than enjoyed the last 10 years together-- they've loved them!

Rose Middleton, Rose Designs, Inc., and Rae Person, RARE Construction, Inc., are principles at their respective companies, and they are celebrating 10 years of marriage *and* 10 years of working together. Has it been a blissful 10 years?

“No,” they answer in unison, laughing. “Blissful? No. Stressful? Yes!”

Admittedly, balancing the challenges of living and working together isn't always easy, but the pair believe several tenets have made their partnerships successful:

- They share a deep love.
- They share similar values.
- They argue, but they fight fair.
- They forgive each other every day (and sometimes several times a day!).

A Look Back

Both Rose and Rae seemed destined for their careers. Rose's father, an engineer, taught her drafting at an early age. At 14, she remodeled the family basement with an ulterior motive of hosting parties. She borrowed banner paper from her cheerleading squad, painted it and created an unusual but creative ceiling. Rae worked his way through college in the construction field. After college, he went to work for a large engineering firm where he ended up in a cubicle drawing “small cogs for big wheels.” Six months later, he left the firm and started his first remodeling company in Wichita, KS.

Thus began the start of professional careers that have included three different businesses and positions at various Kansas City companies, resulting in a combined 60 years of industry experience and broad social and professional networks.

They met and began dating while working for the same local cabinet distributor, with Rae in commercial sales and Rose in residential design. When the cabinet distributor shut its doors, Rae moved on to a large international firm and Rose to a prominent plumbing supply company to design their new showroom. All the while, Rose was slowly building Rose Designs on the side while holding down her full-time job. One particular Rose Designs job called for an engineer's perspective, so Rose asked Rae (then her fiancée) to sit in on the whole house remodel meeting. Impressed with Rae's knowledge and experience, the client immediately asked him to remodel their home! In a risky leap of faith, and with the support of his new wife of just three months, Rae followed his heart, quit his job and opened his own business.

Six months later, after doing double-duty working with Rae at night and on weekends, Rose left her full-time job to help grow the new business. The excitement in their voices as they recount how they came to this monumental decision makes it seem like they joined forces last week instead of in 1999. And even though the first year was rough after the whole house remodel was completed ("bang-on-doors" rough, according to Rae), they survived. Rose investigated industry resources to help build the business and she learned about the Remodeler's Show at the American Royal. They borrowed a cabinet display from a colleague on the condition they'd add a tile backsplash to it before they returned it. They exhibited with a 10x10 booth and introduced the public to RARE Construction and Rose Designs. It was there the business took off.

From that event forward, Rose and Rae have been present at every trade show because they want clients to feel the personal touch from the very beginning of their relationship. They are involved in every project, from conception to completion. To this day, they are the only official salespeople in the company because they know the value of building relationships.

Becoming involved with the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) proved to be a smart move for the pair. NARI is a not-for-profit trade association committed exclusively to serving the professional remodeling industry and to serving as an ally to homeowners. The association has more than 7,000 members nationwide and 261 in the Kansas City area. Rose and Ray enjoy being active in the group. Rose is a NARI Certified Kitchen and Bath Remodeler.

Growing at a Smart Pace

In their early years, they added staff to support their increasing business, including their foreman who is still with the company today, now as its superintendent. In 2003, explosive growth hit the firm and they were faced with how to handle that growth. "I told Rae I could handle a small kingdom, but we weren't going to build an empire," remembers Rose. They credit a great deal of their success at this time to a course taught by David Lupberger, Master Builder Group.

"At this point, we sought help from David's Remodelers' Turnkey Program so we could get a handle on how to run the internal processes and procedures of the business effectively," Rose said. "We knew we didn't want to be the biggest company in town, but we wanted to run like we were."

In 2006, Rose added designers and office help to support their growth and expand the design/build concept of the company. Rose trained them to follow their mission of "Creating an exciting, challenging and rewarding construction experience for our clients, employees and suppliers through creative design and problem solving, excellent

customer service and fair business practices.” In 2007, they officially incorporated Rose Designs, further expanding their offering to include window treatments, furniture and interior design. They began entering, and winning, design competitions, including NARI Remodeler of the Year in 2006, KCH&G Remodeler of the Year in 2007 and NARI Remodeler of the Year, 2008. “I never felt I had to prove anything by winning contests,” said Rose, “but I wanted our designers to show off their incredible work. And, it’s been good for business.”

“We are chameleons,” Rose said. “Every project is different and reflects the client’s taste. Some clients choose designers based on their style. Our clients choose us because we help them identify and interpret their own individual styles. You can’t walk into a home and know that we’re behind the renovation or redesign. We don’t stamp it with our personalities; we stamp it with theirs.”

While Rose and Rae’s companies obviously offer different services, approximately 95% of their client projects include some aspect of both RARE Construction and Rose Designs, which often causes them to draw on one of the original tenets of their relationship. What happens when they don’t agree on a project?

“We are both Type A personalities,” Ray said, “so we allow ourselves to disagree at work. But, the final call goes to the person in that area of expertise.” Finding solutions this way has proved effective. “Something you’ll hear pretty often from Rose is, ‘That’s a question for Rae.’ And I’m always saying, ‘I am not a designer.’”

Building on the Success

The hardworking couple is grateful for their many experiences, especially in this challenging economic climate. “We’ve seen ups and downs in the economy before,” Rose said. “When the banks stopped lending for larger projects, we switched gears. This recession has kept people at home. Because they are “cocooning” right now, they want their homes to be warm and comfortable, and that’s where we shine. We consider ourselves “lifestyle designers” and problem solvers. We look at your existing home and identify areas that will better suit your lifestyle. Whether it’s reallocating space so teenagers have more independent places to hang out or sneaking extra room from a hallway closet for a new bathroom, we’ve solved these problems before with the design/build concept and we love taking on new challenges. Right now, we’re seeing a lot of bathroom and kitchen renovations.”

“We love what we do,” Rae admits. “If it’s not a win-win situation, then we have to find something else to do. We actually earn less than we have in the past, but I think we have a bigger sense of accomplishment. And we enjoy the flexibility it gives us with our families.” Their combined large family keeps things moving at home and at work. One child interned with the company—a move that jump-started her career—and others hope to follow in the future.

Rose and Rae learned a long time ago that it’s not all about money. “When I wake up in the morning, I think about everyone’s families depending on us. I look at it as x-number of mouths to feed, and I can’t just get back under the covers if I don’t feel like working. I think for many small business owners, it’s the strongest motivator out there.”

A strong family focus is integral for Rose, Rae and all their employees. Their 8-4:30, Monday thru Friday business hours reflect that, as do their family-friendly activities like holiday parties. “We’re very family-oriented,” said Rose. “We provide insurance, vacation and time off to take care of ‘family stuff.’”

Ten Years Later

Nothing is perfect, and Rose and Rae realize that. They like to consider their clients “Clients for Life,” but they fear they haven’t done a good enough job of keeping in touch with everyone.

“On this 10-year milestone, we’ll concentrate on tracking down the folks we’ve worked with over the years to thank them for contributing to our success,” Rose said. “We count our blessings every day, and family, employees and our customers are part of those blessings.”



Rae and Rose celebrate at the 2008 REMY Awards night