

ONE-ON-ONE

From cycling to business, Dunne believes in excellence

By Helen Robinson

In her 10-year career as a professional cyclist, Karen Dunne took gold in the 1999 Pan American Games women's individual road race, earned two fourth-place stage finishes in the 1996 Tour de France Féminin, and won 11 U.S. National Championships.

But she points to her years as tandem pilot for world champion blind cyclist Matt King as one of the most rewarding times in her cycling career.

"He was the stoker, or the person in the back, and I was the pilot in the front, and we really learned about being in sync with each other and picking up non-verbal cues as well as verbal cues," Dunne recalled.

"It was really fulfilling to be up to something a bit bigger than just my own... 'single bike.'"

These days Dunne, principal at Maven Design Studio, guides her clients through visual communication and design solutions, helping them build a compelling digital presence and achieve their business goals.

She talked with the Business Journal about the lessons she took from cycling to her business career, doing business in the Springs and what's next for Maven.

You're from Detroit, how did you come to the Springs?

Originally what brought me here was the Olympic Training Center. I've recently gotten back riding the track again because they've covered it, so I'm going over there to work out a couple of days a week.

What did you like about cycling?

Cycling was fabulous; it took me all over the world. Athletes get into their areas based on their talents and physiology, and my physiology lent itself to being what they call a field sprinter on the road and a points racer on the track, so I did both. I did the Tour de France for women — it was grueling. I've done world cups and other events in Europe. Where Americans know football and baseball, cycling is one of the top sports for Europe; it's so central. There's much more enthusiasm; there's more following for it; the crowds are huge. I loved racing in that kind of environment.

Who are your clients, and how do you help them?

Our clients are small- to medium-sized established businesses — as opposed to start-ups — that are looking to create more lead generation off their digital presence or create a professional presence. They need something that conveys who they are and why they're doing what they're doing. We're combining that messaging, the language and the imagery, along with taking advantage of what's happening on the web. We do full print too, so we take care of both sides. One of the things we do best is really capture the essence of the individual or the essence of the company.

What was the transition from cycling to your career in design?

Cycling didn't bring home a big paycheck for women — especially back then — so I'd been doing this type of work in the off-season during cycling and during graduate school on the side. When I retired from cycling [in 2001] it became a full-time thing. I was always on that business track, for my undergrad degree in business economics and public policy, and for my master's in sports management at Indiana University. Indiana is how I got started in cycling — Indiana University is really popular for cycling. I started cycling to keep in shape and ... I found that I was just naturally suited for it, really quickly.

What did you bring from cycling to this career?

I brought quite a bit; not necessarily tied directly to cycling but to being an athlete. Those qualities of excellence and determination, in terms of persistence and not calling something complete until it's polished, until it's at its peak. I also think it takes stamina to run your own business — mentally, spiritually and emotionally. It can be all-encompassing, and I actually like that. I like to be really deep into it, both in terms of developing the business, always asking what's next, how can we improve and be available for our clients. The relationship piece of business is a key value of mine, to have really service-oriented relationships with my clients. Even though we're working in the digital world for the most part, it always comes down to human-to-human connection.

What makes the Springs a place you choose to stay?

It's the size of the community. I only live a couple of miles north of downtown, so there's this aspect where I feel my world can be within this 10-minute radius. When I start to think of the number of businesses that are in this city it's amazingly big, yet it also seems very accessible in terms of establishing relationships and knowing people within the community. It really always comes down to a person-to-person relationship. Having good relationships is one of the things I value, and that seems really possible here.

What's next for Maven?

I've really been digging into that this past month or two actually. There are times, in terms of cycles of the business, where we're further refining what we're up to, who we serve, why we serve them. Looking ahead to the coming year, we're further defining the who and the why and the what. ... Even though some of the deliverables are print material, a program, a trade-show booth, a website, a web application, a business card, what we're really up to is helping people grow their business. So I've really been focused on further defining that — how we can be the conduit for the goals our clients have in mind. • CSBJ



Photo by Helen Robinson

**KAREN
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