



car crazy

Student Leslie Kennedy helped Meguiar's, Inc., go toe-to-toe with major international corporations and become the top car wax company in the world. Now she's leading Car Crazy Central, a Meguiar's-funded company that aspires to be the hub of the car hobby universe.

"When we developed the concept for Car Crazy, a lot of media celebrated cars, but nobody celebrated the people," Kennedy says. "Car Crazy is about the passion, the attitude, the people that love engines, cars and the lifestyle that surrounds this hobby. We call them 'car guys.'"

At Car Crazy's studios in Irvine, an office complex where every bit of furniture and trim is car-related, down to the race-car seats in the boardroom and the polished engines under the glass table, Kennedy and her staff are getting ready to launch CarCrazy.com, a full-service multi-media platform for car guys. The site will offer a slate of services including radio and television programs, on-line groups for car fanatics of every stripe, a humor section and even ringtones that make your cell phone sound like a Hemi engine.

But Kennedy's life and career are about more than cars, which is why she enrolled in VU's graduate religion program with an emphasis in leadership in 2004. Business success aside, her most important life mission, she says, is to make the gospel accessible to people who feel alienated by organized religion.

"Christians unwittingly put huge fences up," she says. "It's so foreign and scary for an unchurched person to attend a church service. You don't know how to act, or what the lingo means. So people give up. If I could help them go to church and hang in there, my time would be well spent on the planet."

Kennedy's father was the youngest graduate ever (at 19) of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, an Air Force pilot and a brilliant academic with two PhDs from Cornell University. He had been commissioned to serve as dean of the Air Force Academy



Leslie Kennedy, continued from page 7

in Colorado Springs when he died returning home from Vietnam. He was 35.

That brought turmoil to the Kennedy family. “My dad was my mentor and role model. I have always aspired to meet what I thought his expectations would have been,” Leslie says. “I couldn’t understand why God took him.”

The Kennedys left Germany on a Red Cross airplane and, back in the U.S., went through a difficult and trying time. Leslie learned that “nothing is permanent, therefore make the best of every situation and learn how to survive. It taught me you are not in control,” she says.

She and her siblings supported themselves through college. At first Leslie trained to be a psychologist, then took an abrupt turn into public relations where she found her stride. In her mid-20s she was hired by Meguiar’s. The owners and many employees were openly Christian, and Kennedy was drawn to their consistency and peace. When she was 28, she gave her life to the Lord. She began attending Saddleback Church back in the days when it still met in a high school gymnasium, and says Rick Warren was a “huge part” of her conversion.

“It’s hard to convert as an adult,” she says. “People only do it in the depth of despair.”

In her late twenties Kennedy left Meguiar’s and started her own PR company. It was wildly successful, and she sold it after three years and retired in her early 30s. But retirement bored her, so she contacted owner Barry Meguiar to see if she could come back to Meguiar’s. Since then, Meguiar’s has

grown to ten times its previous size. Kennedy helped the relatively tiny family-owned company climb to the top of the industry against heavyweight competitors like Clorox.

“Leslie was vice president of corporate communications at Meguiar’s and took our impressions — someone who reads or sees your ad or brand — from 35 million to more than 2 billion a year,” Barry says. “There’s a reason we became the number one car wax in the U.S.: Car Crazy, which is part of PR and the whole area Leslie has run.”

The Car Crazy radio program now airs in 130 markets worldwide, and on Sirius, XM and American and United airlines. The Car Crazy television show airs 52 weeks a year on the Speed Channel, and is viewed by a weekly audience of about 2 million.

Kennedy, anticipating the convergence between Internet technology, television and radio, proposed creating a Car Crazy multimedia platform to deliver everything a car guy could ever want, including original programming, live feeds from famous car shows and connection to other car hobbyists locally and worldwide. In January 2005, Kennedy left Meguiar’s to pioneer Car Crazy Central whose portal is CarCrazy.com. Today the company employs more than twenty people, including high-level designers and professionals from Disney, Adidas, MGM Studios and AutoByTel.

As she was preparing to lead the new company, Kennedy came to VU to get her master’s degree in religion, following her “thirst for knowledge.”

“I love it. I mean, I love it,” she says of her religion classes at VU. “I get to immerse myself in learning and in God, which are two of the most interesting things to me. It’s like going to church for four days — really good church. Like coming out of one of those services where you’re really pumped.”

Kennedy, who has been married for 23 years and has two daughters, 21 and 19, wants her VU degree to speed her toward her ultimate life goal.

“I don’t think God put me on this earth to sell car wax,” she says. “I don’t know what he put me on this earth for, but whatever it is, this is preparation.”

She believes part of her calling is to help Christians tear down cultural barriers that keep outsiders from embracing the gospel. That dovetails nicely with Car Crazy’s mission, too.

“Car Crazy is about pulling the hobby together, but we’re not doing this just for cars,” says Barry Meguiar. “This is about being salt and light. Meguiar’s has a Christian influence in everything we do. We make no bones about it. Using the Car Crazy Central Internet model, we want to build an entity that links Christian laypeople across the world to encourage each other, pray for each other, to network and encourage people to go out and be bold. It’s supernatural what’s taking place.”

Kennedy, who’s at the forefront of it all, sees it as a chance to accomplish something great for the car hobby, and for the Kingdom.