

# Cindy Creasy

## *Trade and Concepts*

by Charles G. McGuigan

Cindy Creasy Woolfolk grew up around music, promotions, public relations, production and advertising. She was immersed in a bath of radio and television from the time she was an infant, and she osmotically absorbed everything about the industry. She's a gracious woman with a bountiful heart, a fluid voice and the spirit of a bonvivant. She's a natural born entertainer with blue-green eyes, blonde hair and a smattering of reddish freckles over an alabaster complexion. Over the years she has worked hard for small businesses, mapping out advertising strategies, creating marketing concepts. It's always been one-on-one, Cindy and the client. And now she's taken this to a whole new level with James River Trading Exchange.



PHOTOS: JOHN MACLELLAN

**W** E SIT IN THE LIVING ROOM of her Ginter Park home where two love seats oppose one another from across the room. Every square inch of the place is decorated to the hilt for Christmas. Nothing tacky here—everything elegant, and the furnishings eclectic in the extreme.

She is dressed in basic black, which highlights her eyes and skin. There's a softness about her and an ease with people that belie a mind that works rapidly, sizing things up, creating images and ideas. She's a clever woman who exudes confidence and has a deep understanding of her industry.

### THE CLIENT COMES FIRST

All through her professional career in advertising and public relations, Cindy has kept the best interest of her clients in mind. Rather than creating costly campaigns that feed the ego of the concept person more

than the cash register of the business owner, Cindy has always created ad campaigns that are easy on the pocket book and actually increase sales for the business.

"There are two schools of thought within this business," she says. "There's the creative you can do to really try to get the awards and to get noticed. And then there is what's going to work for the client. And I've always really tried to work for the client."

She considers all the fancy bells and whistles that can cost the client an arm and a leg. All day shoots, expensive props, and so on. "It's much easier to have a \$20,000 budget and to go out and hire actors and do it on film and have all this great technical work and all these people to help you do a commercial," she says. But the real challenge comes with working on a shoestring budget and deriving results for the client. "What's difficult is taking \$2,500 and making a spot, one that the client can be proud of and one that will increase their business.

That's truly it. And I think sometimes we tend to lose that focus. You get a little hung up on, 'Wouldn't it be cool if we did this, or what if we just shot this angle.' But what is it doing for the client? That's the question I've always asked."

Cindy learned these basics when she was just a child. Even then she was doing voice work for electronic media for Cindy was a broadcasting brat. Her father Gene worked radio and television and moved the family around to various markets.

### A HOUSE OF MUSIC

Cindy was born in Newport News, but six months later moved with the family to Baltimore, where her father would work at WBAL, WITH, WCAO—all AMs—over the next nine years. Before she was even born her father worked in Boston and then New York, and throughout his career worked in virtually all the major East Coast Markets.

After Baltimore, the family returned to Virginia, moving back to Lynchburg, the hometown of Cindy's parents.

The Creasy home was always filled with music. Gene was a talented jazz musician who specialized in standup bass. "But he could play anything," says Cindy. "You could hand him something and he'd figure it out just like that." He played professionally, played in an era when the black musicians on break had to eat in the kitchen, something Gene Creasy could never understand. But the purity of the music cut straight through him.

"We grew up with it," Cindy remembers. "We just sang and played music, and my dad always had parties with jazz musicians. We grew up that way, listening to Stan Getz, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington. My dad was a jazz purist."

And Cindy's mother, Ella, also brought her own brand of music to the family. "My mother's family was very country-oriented,"



says Cindy. "I mean real country music, not bluegrass. She had two brothers that were in country music bands in the Lynchburg area. There was always music around the house, particularly the jazz."

#### BRINGING UP CINDY

Ironically, Gene, the jazz musician, programmed top 40 rock 'n roll on the AM stations because that was what the market dictated. He did virtually everything you can do in the broadcast industry. He was on-air talent for many years. He was a disc jockey, did music radio, did production and ended up doing a lot of national voice work for affiliated stations—things like call letters and station IDs. Later in his career, he would become one of the nation's top ten program directors at the tale end of the era when AM radio was in its prime. He would then move into television management and ownership.

During those Lynchburg years, Cindy remembers sitting around the dining room table with her father and mother and they'd be doing concept work. "I really did work in radio and television ever since I was little," she says. "My dad would come home and talk about a new client to the four of us kids. He'd say, 'We have a new client and we need to come up with a really neat idea.' Ever since I can remember I've doing voice work, I've been doing concept work, all of that stuff. I was brought up in the industry."

#### DAMN VIRGINIA YANKEES

The Creasy's lived in one of the first 13 homes of a then-new suburban community called Wildwood, which was just outside Lynchburg, practically straddling the Nelson County line. It was a middle-class community that would eventually mushroom into a subdivision of several hundred homes. Cindy attended the New London Academy, and then Brookville Middle and Brookville High, public schools all. She

loved sports, excelled at softball and basketball, was also a cheerleader.

"Remember," she says. "I grew up in Baltimore and we went to all the Colts' games, the Orioles' games, the Bullets' games." On about the time of her graduation from high school, her father got a job down in Mississippi—a South so removed from Virginia that it could have been another country altogether. The family moved to the town of Greenwood, dab smack in the middle of the state in the Delta. It was culturally shocking, but hauntingly beautiful "Being from Virginia we'd always thought of ourselves as being Southerners," Cindy remembers. "But when we moved to Mississippi, we were Yankees, and we did not fit in."

Cindy, who with her three brothers had been performing music since their high school days, was awarded a two-year voice scholarship to Mississippi Delta Junior College based on her audition there. "I was always singing," she tells. As were her brothers, Michael, Mitch and Mark.

#### MISS LEFLORE COUNTY

While in Mississippi, Cindy was the vocalist for her own band. Called the Patrick Knight Band, the group played mainly covers in small clubs and bars in the Delta, places like The Keg. "I can remember one place where they had chicken wire across the stage," she says.

She also entered and won the Miss LeFlore County Beauty Pageant and then went on to compete in the Miss Mississippi Pageant. "Mississippi is big pageant country," says Cindy. But she wasn't particularly interested in the crown. "I competed for Miss Mississippi and got a lot of attention because of my vocals, but I wasn't really pageant material," she says. "I enjoyed singing more than I did the pageant. I was going after the scholarship money."

After finishing her studies in the Deep South, Cindy came to Richmond where she

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## COVER STORY

studied mass communications at Virginia Commonwealth University. Living in a city agreed with her. "I loved VCU," says Cindy. "I loved the urban setting and I think that's what changed my direction as to where I chose to live. I grew up in suburban America and then I went to VCU and loved the urban life and the city."

As college jobs go, she had a pretty cushy one. She was making eight bucks an hour (at the time a good chunk of change) as a receptionist, messenger, Jill-of-all-trades at the law firm of Thomas & Fiske, which was then located at the corner of Boulevard and Idlewood. When she completed her undergraduate work in 1987, she went to look for work locally in advertising, but things were entrenched in Richmond and there was an overabundance of recent grads in the ad field. "When I first got out I couldn't buy a job in Richmond because there was such an influx of VCU students and a closed advertising society," she says.

### POPEYE AND BOURBON STREET

So Cindy returned to the Deep South. She landed a job as an account coordinator in the Big Easy and lived with one of her brothers on Bourbon Street. "I went to work for an ad agency that was based in Houston, but they had a satellite office in New Orleans and their biggest client was Popeye's Famous Fried Chicken," she says. For about the next year, she spent her time between Houston and New Orleans. She'd catch a flight to Texas and work three days a week in the offices out there, and then return to the satellite office in New Orleans. "Flights left on Southwest every twenty minutes," she recalls. "It was a wonderful time."

But she wasn't entirely happy with the corporate agency work. "I grew up in radio where you did everything, where you could really help the client," says Cindy. "You wrote copy for free. You did it all. You had a personal relationship with the client and it just wasn't that way at Black, Gillock & Langberg." So she left the corporate agency work about a year after she started and returned to something she knew and loved—radio.

### MEET CARY SHAFER

"I went to work for WSMB," she says. "It was AM talk radio, afternoon drive." Her on-air name was derived from her old

haunts in Richmond's Fan District. "My radio name was Kerry Shafer," she says, pronouncing Kerry as Cary. "The Kerry was for Cary Street, and Shafer was for Shafer Street."

Nine months later she was offered a job with WRLH, the FOX affiliate in Richmond. She was made marketing manager, handled all their promotions and contests. She was also their media buyer. Her brain was soaking up information at an amazing rate. She was learning everything about advertising and public relations. And then in 1992, three years after she had joined the staff at WRLH, she was hit with two proposals almost simultaneously. One was for a job handling publicity for the popular television series, "America's Most Wanted". The other proposal was of a more intimate



nature: Dr. Royce Woodson Woolfolk, Jr. asked for Cindy's hand in marriage.

### TOTALLY LANDMARK

"I ended up turning down the offer with 'America's Most Wanted,'" she says. Which was probably a fortuitous thing. Two weeks after the job offer was made, the man who asked Cindy to join his staff was fired. "It was probably a good thing that I rejected the offer," she says.

But she did accept the other proposal, and almost immediately began her own agency, just the sort of agency she had always dreamed working at. "I started Creasy Woolfolk Concepts as soon as I quit work at FOX," she says. "And for the next two or three years, FOX-35 was my largest client."

Two years later, she incorporated and began attracting large clients with fairly

## COVER STORY

big budgets—Richmond Ford and Rees Jewelers, for example. While consulting at FOX she created the tagline “Your Landmark Dealer” for Richmond Ford, and “Your Total Door Store” for Apple Door. “We would just sit down and talk to get an idea of who they were really trying to reach and what their niche was, what differentiated them,” she says. “We would try to develop a tag line that in one quick sentence summed up who they were, what made them different, things like that and then we would write the commercials and then we’d go out and produce them and then I’d help edit them. We did the whole thing from concept to the end product.”

### ELLA, GENE & CINDY

In those early years, Creasy Woolfolk Concepts was a family affair. “Me and my mother were the agency,” she says. “And my father, who was still alive back then, also helped out. My mother and my father had done a lot of work in radio and TV, so they were able to help me with trafficking and voicing, concept work and things like that.”

It was also her parents who helped instill in their daughter an ethic about community and fairness. “I remember my mother always teaching us that you respect anyone and everyone until that individual gives you a reason not to,” Cindy says.

Her father came from an era of broadcasting when community was central to everything. “That’s the way I was raised,” she says. “My father worked in radio and television back in the days when they were really community-oriented. If there was a walk for the March of Dimes, you mentioned it, you were there, you did whatever you could. It wasn’t anything about them giving you money to be there. That’s how I grew up, going to community events every weekend.”

As her business continued to grow, she never lost sight of these fundamentals. She considers the campaign she launched for Richmond Ford. “It was a totally different advertising idea,” she says. “Most car businesses are a hard sell. What Mr. Robert King (owner of Richmond Ford) was willing to do with me allowed me to do image advertising for car dealers as opposed to hard sell and it really worked extremely well for them. They knew pricing wise they would not necessarily always be able to beat their competitors. But that’s not what they were in business for and they weren’t going to apologize for not being the cheapest people in town. People came for service and the relationship.” The resulting campaign rarely showed price points or massive amounts of inventory. It was all image and much of it was community-oriented. “It was a very simplistic, tailored look,” she says. “We had events in the ads. It was really different. And at the time it was cutting edge, though now you see it more and more all the time.”

### THE IRONHORSE & O’TOOLE’S

During much of her professional career in Richmond, Cindy, along with raising two sons, still found the time to perform. She sang at The Ironhorse in Ashland and O’Toole’s in Westover Hills for almost a decade. She always loved the involvement. As part of her commitment to community she also produced ads for the now-defunct Greater Richmond Environmental Action Trust.

In fairly rapid succession, around the millennia, Cindy lost two of her best clients—Richmond Ford and Rees Jewelers. But she had been hatching something on a back burner for some time. It was a trade exchange and has now been in operation for just under a year and has already attracted about 100 area businesses.

“It’s really kind of an interesting transition how I got from Creasy Woolfolk to James River Trade,” says Cindy. “Because essentially, in many ways, they do the exact same thing. They develop businesses.”

### JAMES RIVER TRADE EXCHANGE

James River Trade Exchange enables members (primarily small business owners) to trade their own services or goods for services or goods offered by another member, thereby reducing overhead, and helping both business members. “That’s what I think I’ve really enjoyed all along about the whole process, from the time I was doing voice work as a child until now,” Cindy says. “The idea of really trying to help businesses. Helping them identify their niche and conserve cash and helping them build relationships that will fortify their future. And bring the consumer in to spend.”

Later, out on the front porch, Cindy sings the praises of North Side, its diversity and its tolerance, its quiet streets and its urban hum. She tells me that there has been a noticeable trend lately: People seem to be less and less enamored of corporate businesses, preferring, in stead, Mom and Pop operations.

“We’re coming back around to what it’s really all about,” she says. “And that’s servicing the community. And the real heroes in it all this are the ones who have opened businesses, the ones who are striving everyday to keep their businesses open, the ones who do it day in and day out. And that’s where James River Trade can come in and help in that regard as far as conserving cash and that’s where Creasy Woolfolk Concepts can come in as far as presenting your message.”

She relishes the fact that both her businesses dovetail so nicely. “The idea of community is still central for me,” she says. “As silly as it might sound, all these teeny little things add up to the big picture of a place and a person and a business being able to truly contribute to the community, to the neighborhood. That’s why I’ve always been in this business.”

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