

Cathedral parishioners merge marriage with business

When Tom Kinstle of Homeland retired from Lockheed Martin in 2002 and joined his wife's Timonium-based design business, he wasn't worried that too much togetherness would cause conflicts at work or at home.

"I dabble here," the 73-year-old Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland parishioner said. "It's Ruth's business."

That statement caused his youthful-looking 60-year-old wife to erupt in laughter and then wag her finger at him.

"Wait a minute," Ms. Kinstle playfully protested. "I don't know that I like the tone of that. It sounds like you want to spend more time on the golf course. You can't quit on me."

As the couple discussed their 23-year partnership in marriage and Mr. Kinstle's five-year official tenure at Down Under Design, a company Ms. Kinstle started 15 years ago, they often completed each others sentences and sang one another's praises.

"Tom has always been involved in the business, even though it wasn't official until a few years ago," she said. "I've used him as a sounding board and he's offered his advice since I started the business. So, when he retired, it was a natural progression for him to come on board."

Working together also wasn't beyond their experience before Mr. Kinstle began his marketing job at Down Under Design, a company that designs promotional messages and emblazes them on a host of items through methods including embroidery and silk screening.

They worked together at Honeywell, a defense contractor, for about nine years when they both lived in Minneapolis, admittedly not as closely as they collaborate now.

"It never even occurred to me that it would be a problem," said Ms. Kinstle, as she

and her husband walked through each department of the 8,000-square-foot facility on Greenspring Drive.

"I'm also only here 15 to 20 hours a week," Mr. Kinstle said. "So, there isn't a whole lot of time for me to get in her way."

As the couple left the graphic design department and entered the noisy embroidery division, where automated sewing machines were embroidering "BPD" on six caps simultaneously for the Baltimore City Police Department, Ms. Kinstle remembered the company's humble beginnings in the sunroom of her home.

In 1987 fellow Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parishioner Georgia Jordan convinced her to join her in purchasing a single-head embroidery machine and the two began the small company, R.G. Kindan, a hybrid of their names.

As the business grew, it took up more space in the Kinstle's home and Ms. Jordan, who is now deceased, decided to leave the upward-moving company.

In 1993 Ms. Kinstle merged her business with a screen-printing company called Down Under Design and took control of the firm two years later when that partner left to pursue other interests, moving the operation to its current location in 1996.

Down Under Design currently employs 15 people, including Sales Manager Mandy Stepp, Ms. Kinstle's 31-year-old daughter, who is also a docent at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen and a member of its choir.

Perhaps Ms. Stepp will take the business over one day, if she is so inclined, Ms. Kinstle pondered. "But, I have no time frame in mind for leaving the business. As long as it's fun and it goes well, I'll stay with it."

And as long as Mr. Kinstle's marketing job at the company holds his interest, the two will continue to share an office.

"I really like having him here," she said with a chuckle, and added "hopefully it's not interrupting his golf game too much."