

James and Kathy Wiebe
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They work, play, and live together. James and Kathy Wiebe also eat, pray and love together. 24/7? Some days, but individuality and differing outside interests' reigns for this couple.

The information age, or digital age, if you will, where global communication is possible through the Internet by way of personal computers, allows professionals to work from home or even at the beach armed with a laptop and Bluetooth. It is also the age where couples join forces and home-based businesses sprout up daily.

Today, the U.S. Bureau of Labor reports there are more than 18.1 million home-based businesses in the United States alone.

The Wiebe's are part of this group. Even though James Wiebe has at least two offices outside his home office, he says, "All decisions are pretty much made right over there at the kitchen counter. That's where we look at documents, go over crucial business tasks and make the bulk of decisions."

James is a tall lanky fiftyish computer guru who for the last three decades has concentrated on staying ahead of technology. He describes himself as a serial entrepreneur, having developed three businesses over the past thirty years. First, he founded Newer Technology Inc. which became a leader in Macintosh CPU upgrades, and earned a credit in the movie *Jurassic Park*, televisions "24" and in the original Transformer movie.

Next, with the help of his wife, Kathy, they founded WiebeTech, developing and marketing digital forensic computer storage devices. At that time, the entire business was in the house. Kathy worked downstairs, and James worked upstairs.

"We had three employees also working in our home plus our two daughters," said Kathy. "The girls were only in junior high and elementary school, but they joined us in the distribution area and we paid them by the piece to pack boxes. They still work at various jobs for the business."

They sold WiebeTech to CRU-DATAPORT in 2008, however the name remains. James is still an occasional consultant for them. "I also do a lot of speaking engagements on computer forensics."

By 2009, the team were off and running once again founding Belite Aircraft. The couple acquired tooling, and existing parts and production rights to the Kitfox Lite aircraft, given they would rebrand the company. Belite was born and the Wiebe's were in the ultralite aircraft business. Since, James has redesigned the aircraft parts from steel, wood or aluminum, to carbon fiber allowing for a much lighter and more economical plane.

The Belite is offered in both kit form and as a completed flyable airplane. There are no requirements to fly the ultralight, but Wiebe says they always recommend that the person be able to fly an airplane solo.

"If an instructor does not give them solo status, then they have no business flying our airplane." In the past, they've been part-owners in a Cessna 172 and owned a Cessna 206 and logged over 900 hours for business on the 206.

James says the plane has a market with retired pilots, amateur photographers, and hobbyists who like to build things. That's where Kathy, who is a marketing specialist come in. The ultralight also fits the person who has flown for years and is losing their medical due to age and looking for their last airplane."

Kathy is an attractive, smart, personality-plus conservative, whose creative branding experience matches the visions of any start-up company. She brings years of experience to the table from Associated Advertising, then owned by her father, Pres Huston. She started as a copywriter and eventually led the media production efforts.

She tells the story of how she and James began working together. "I had left Associated and was doing a lot with my church and charity work, plus raising two daughters, so wasn't looking for another job. I'm not an electronics person. I mean, I can operate the computer and a whiz on software, but I know nothing about hardware."

James had just started WiebeTech and was getting ready for the huge Mac World trade show. Kathy developed his marketing kit for the booth, and was ready to settle back and listen to reports of progress from the show. But at the last minute the person going with James had to back out. That meant Kathy needed to go and help him at the booth.

"Once those doors opened at the trade show, thousands of people swarmed in and for the first two hours it was "James what's this? James how does this work?" sort of thing."

Even with her limited hardware knowledge, it was evident they made a successful team. "That particular trade show put us on the map and after that it was expansion after expansion," said Kathy.

The Wiebe's met while Kathy was at Associated and James owned Newer Technologies. "It was a blind date," said Kathy. "Not love at first sight. It took awhile to figure it out."

There were differences. Kathy says her strength is with public relations and accounting. James is the visionary and risk taker. He is not detailed oriented and Kathy is very detailed. He loves to go fly fishing, flying and camping. Kathy's outside interests are geared toward volunteerism. She works tirelessly as a CASA volunteer and is an advocate through the courts for a family of children. Kathy has also started at church tutoring program with Pleasant Valley Middle School, and teaches Intro to Entrepreneurship at WSU.

They've been married twenty-five years, and for the past several years, they have worked together. So how does it work for husband and wife with varied skills?

"As an entrepreneur James is willing to take risks that I have trouble with," said Kathy. "I've had to let go and trust God that he will take care of us. James can see the outcome and that's really not my gift. If I didn't have a faith that someone else larger than me will take care of the situation, it would be very difficult."

Dave Franson, executive director Wichita Aero Club, who has known the couple for several years, says "James is a genius and can make a successful business from anything. Kathy can take his genius and create a salable marketing campaign. Together, they complete each other."

Debbie Trimmell-Martin, good friend and gal pal of Kathy's says the Wiebe's work well together because of two factors. "The number one factor is they respect each other both professionally and personally. Two, their individual skills complement each other. James is the inventor and she is the practical planner."

Still, both admit it takes work. Trying to get together on the same page took awhile, and James says they definitely had some disagreements in the beginning. “The things that trigger you as a couple will also trigger you as partners in business. You have to work at communication. The commitment to each other spiritually gets you through it. It’s all about how you handle conflict that matters. We’ve come to have a healthy conflict resolution strategy by being aware that both of us sometimes say things that drive the other person nuts. But, we’ve learned to not only stay focused on the point of discussion, but also how to resolve it.”

“Most conflicts are not life or death,” said Kathy, “and if we let them go and not want to always be right, it saves a whole lot of conflict and increases personal emotional wealth. Let the me me me thing go.”

When you work from your home, and own your own company it’s difficult to turn it off. “James makes sure we have date night on Fridays,” said Kathy. “We pretty much own two of those balcony seats at the Warren Theater.”

The one thing that James admires most about Kathy is excellent prioritization. “She has a strong sense of right and wrong on both a business and personal level. I’ve learned a lot from Kathy on how to incorporate my faith into my work view. You know a lot of folks profess Christianity but do a poor job of integrating it into the workforce.”

For Kathy, it is James determination. “When he wants to develop something he doesn’t quit until it’s perfect and workable. When we were dating, the one thing that impressed me was how open to change he is. It has never been my way or no way.”

For future entrepreneurs, James says this is the advice he would give them. “Have a solid long-term business plan, then ask yourself, how am I going to finance this thing in the event my worst case projections come true.”

Even with today’s precarious financial world, James says there are advantages for a start-up company. “You are really taking a huge risk in this economy, but if you have the means to stick it out, it’s an excellent time to start a business. The reason is this. It’s never been so easy to do branding. Because if you are doing marketing right now, you’re sticking out in front of all your competitors, who are scared to death of starting a business. Another thing is, because there are so many who have been laid off, it’s never been easier to find talented employees.”

The Wiebe’s have been successful, and find pleasure in sharing it with others. “We’ve discovered that one of the largest joys in life is giving things away,” said Kathy. “We’ve been able to do some fun things for people. In fact we set up a foundation and our joy is giving.”

For the future, Kathy sees herself working in some area of Christian ministry. “I love the CASA work I do, but down the road, I can see myself perhaps working with missions—helping improvised nations in business areas.”

For James, he says, “Retirement would look a lot like our life now, just with more travel to interesting places. This business cycle we’re in is going to take five years to grow. After that, I don’t know, but if I get a good idea, it’s possible to start another business.”

