

minnesota BUSINESS

How to Bridge the
Gap in Female
Leadership p.16

The BIG
Business of
Owatonna p.3

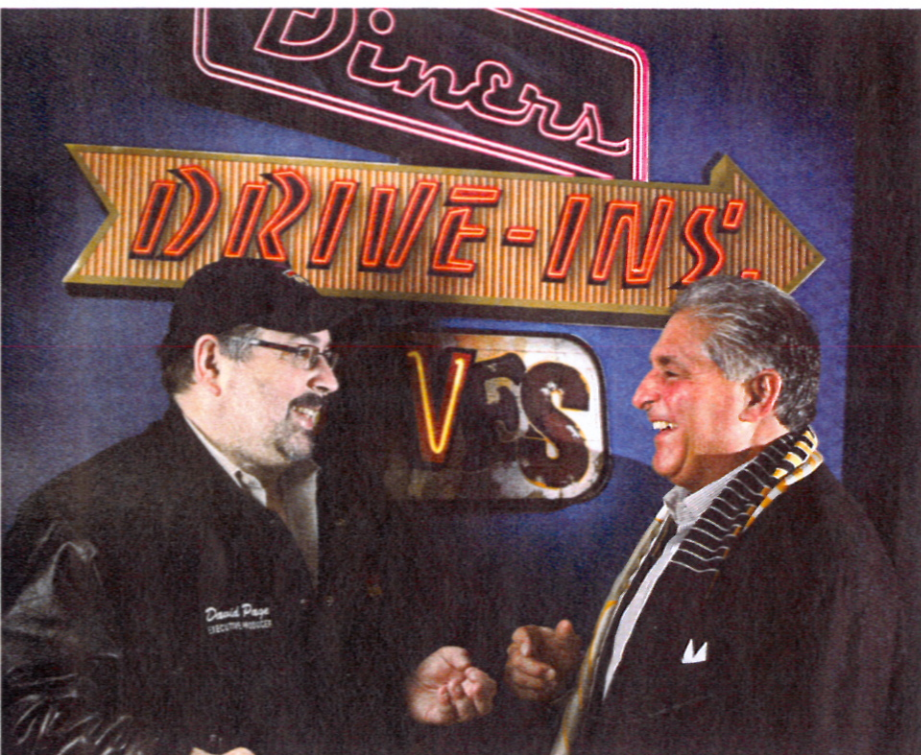
Fixing North Minneapolis



Minneapolis's north side is badly broken,
but Catalyst Community Partners think
they know how to put it back together

p.30

PLUS:
Local Pros
Talk Ponzi
Schemes
p.18



Persistence, Passion and Page

BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER

DAVID PAGE IS PRESIDENT of Page Productions. After 14 years of persistence he became the creator and executive producer of *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*, the Food Network's top-rated series. He is a New Yorker who relocated to the Twin Cities for a job, fell in love with it and made it his home.

SS: How did you launch the series? **DAVID** » I had been trying to sell something—anything—to the Food Network for quite a while, and a very kind executive kept listening to my pitches. I was on the phone with her one day, and I'm pitching and pitching and pitching, and she's not buying. Exasperated she asked if I had anything about diners and I said, "Oh yeah, I've been developing a show called *Diner's Drive-Ins and Dives*." Actually, I hadn't been. It's a name that just fell out of my head. It was a Thursday, and she asked for a write-up by the following Tuesday. I spent the weekend calling restaurants around the country and delivered a write-up on Monday. They had a development meeting on Tuesday and within a matter of weeks they had commissioned a one-hour special called *Diner's Drive-Ins and Dives*, and that's what eventually turned into the series.

SS: Did you think the show would be this big? **DAVID** » When we first did the special, no one told

me that they were looking at it as a pilot for possible series. I was just glad to finally get an opportunity to produce a show of any kind. By the fourth episode, they started using the word 'hit,' but at that point, I was kind of in shock. You know, for 14 years I had been trying to sell anything to anybody, and now I've got a series on one of the most influential cable networks. It just went from there.

SS: What led to your relocation?

DAVID » I got recruited to come to Minnesota and serve as senior vice president and executive producer of the home shopping channel ValueVision, which was being rebranded as ShopNBC. We came out to do that and completed the change over, and I decided I wasn't going to finish my career in home shopping. So we decided to take another leap and open a production company; and we liked Minnesota. This is a creative community with a long history of making cable television, so there is a talent pool here that you won't find, with all due respect, in any number of other Midwestern cities.

SS: Your wife, Roberta Brackman, is your business partner. What's it like working with your spouse?


DAVID » Roberta and I have been working together since 1992 or 1993 when she was my lawyer at NBC. She is the vice president and general counsel of Page Productions and runs all administrative aspects of the business. One of the nicest things about working with your spouse is the intellectual interchange about things that matter to both of you. You are creatively involved together. One of the challenges is to be careful to not let business disagreements become personal arguments, especially if you screw up.

SS: Did you ever put everything on the line?

DAVID » Oh yes, you know those zero percent credit card offers where you can move the balance from one card to another? There was a period of time there shortly before I finally got the show where my wife had become a master of that process. For the better part of three years, money was an issue.

SS: What are some words of advice? **DAVID** » It

isn't about starting a business generically; it's about wanting to do something you love. If you really love something and you know it and you have a reason to want to do it, well, then all I can tell you is it's not going to be easy. It's going to take a long time.

I kept sending in ideas for shows that no one would buy. Comments included, 'I'm sorry, you're a news guy' and 'Why do you think you can do this?' You really have to be stubborn and potentially stupid to stick with it. The key ingredient is curiosity and lucky timing. But, I stuck to it because I just believed that if we did it long enough, if we kept trying, something would hit. I just didn't expect it to hit this big. 

« Steven Schussler (steven@schusslercreative.com) is the Founder, Chairman and CEO of Schussler Creative, Inc., which specializes in creating, designing and developing theatrical attractions, restaurants, retail stores and entertainment venues worldwide.

PHOTO BY TATE CARLSON