

From this week's Focus

## The way we were: Surviving startup

By: Emilie Le Beau May 11, 2009

*Crain's* asked three entrepreneurs to recall the personal sacrifices they and their loved ones endured to get their businesses off the ground.



Running a wedding planning and invitation business means Kara Underwood misses out on a lot of summer socializing with her fiancé. Photo: Stephen J. Serio

### Summer's her hot time

**Kara Underwood, 28**

*Founder and consultant, Magnificent Milestones, an event consulting and invitation design firm in Chicago with projected 2009 revenue of \$250,000*

One summer Saturday two years ago, work forced Kara Underwood to turn down an invitation to go boating with friends. Her fiancé, however, accepted the invitation and, as Ms. Underwood sped along Lake Shore Drive to a wedding reception she was coordinating, she couldn't help envying them all.

"I remember looking at the boats and knowing my fiancé was on one of them," Ms. Underwood says. "I thought, 'What am I doing here?'"

It was the kind of personal tradeoff that she hadn't envisioned when she left her job as a law firm events planner to launch her own business. "Put it this way — if I knew what I was getting myself into, I wouldn't have done it," she says.

For the first 10 months of her business's life, Ms. Underwood worked out of her home while waiting to open her shop in the West Loop. The home office felt inescapable.

"When you're having dinner at the table and there are piles of work at the other end, it's difficult to separate life and work," she says.

Her fiancé was understanding, even as he attended social events solo. "It was hard, but we just ran with it," she recalls.

Most of her time went into preparing the store and managing the littlest details, down to tying bows onto brochures until 3 a.m.

For the first year, she didn't pay herself and went without health insurance. She now has insurance and a profitable business.

The enterprise still cuts into her personal time, especially from May to October, when weddings keep her especially busy.

Missing summertime action is now simply part of the deal. She doesn't mind.

"There are worse places to be than a wedding," she says.