

bio

Age 31

Education Bachelor's degree from Marquette University, interdisciplinary major combining television broadcasting and visual communication.

Background "Everything that I've done in my life has somehow been about creating experiences. Whether it's in the theater bringing to life a unique story, or in the newsroom telling a story with visual elements, or planning a party — they all have similar attributes in making that happen."

Best friend His puppy Molly, a designer mix of purebred pug and purebred beagle known as a "puggle."

Family blessing "When I told my parents I wanted to plan parties, they were worried it wasn't necessarily the most stable job. I didn't have anyone else to lean on, so it had to get off the ground from the start." Fast-forward five years: "My parents love that I've been able to do what I'm so passionate about and to be successful at it. They've been pleasantly surprised."

Special cause In the early years of Dynamic Events, Caruso's clients didn't know he was battling cancer. As a cancer survivor, he volunteers his services to coordinate the Crystal Ball, an annual fund-raiser for the local chapter of the American Cancer Society.

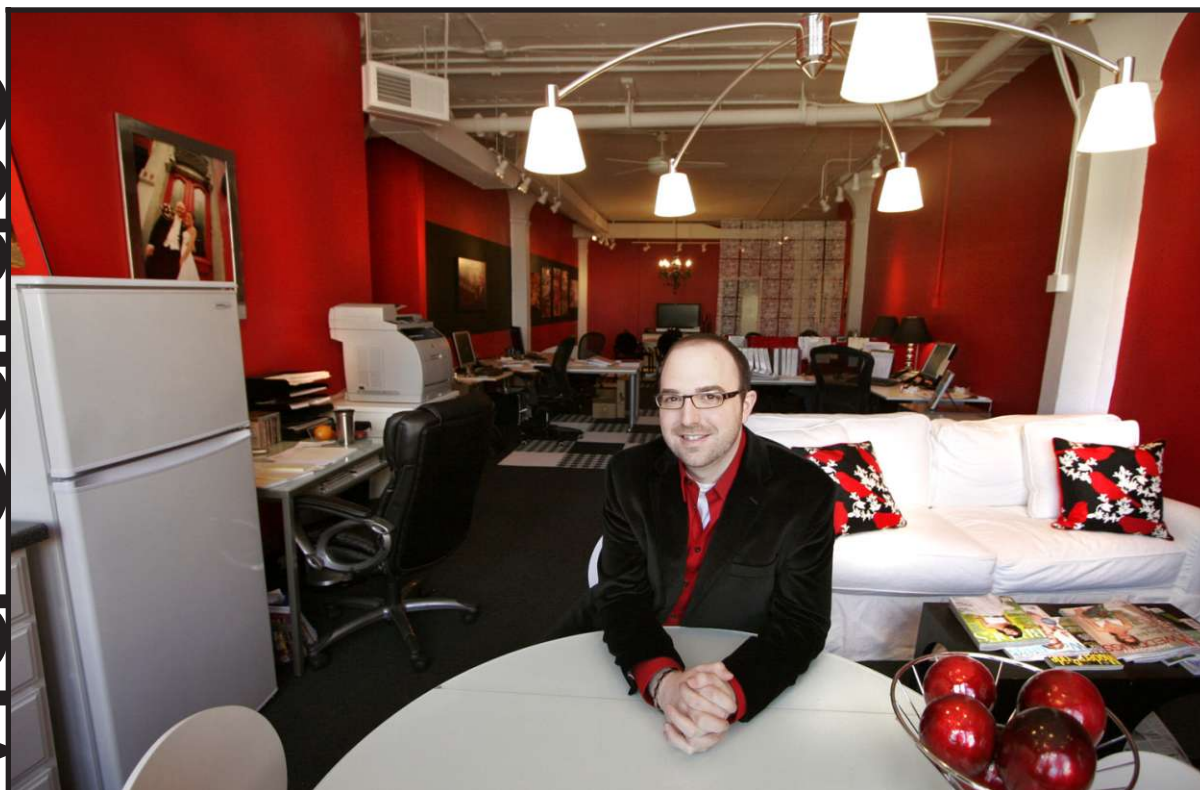
The spice of life "It would be easy to get worn out if you're always doing the same type of event (such as weddings, which account for most of Dynamic Events' bookings). I think I bring more to the table by planning different types of functions. Something we did at a corporate event that worked very nicely might be tailored appropriately and fit very well into a wedding. It provides me with the variety I love, and it provides my clients with an added bonus of that experience."

they say

"He's an amazing event planner who's full of creativity and flexibility. He's just extremely easy to work with. He's extremely detailed, and he brings in things that are totally new to the city, things we wouldn't otherwise see here for years. He just brings events in Milwaukee to a whole new level."

Peggy Williams-Smith,
general manager,
Brynwood Country Club

David Caruso



Creative vision helps him plan the main events

STORY BY **RASHAE OPHUS JOHNSON**
PHOTO BY **C. TAYLOR**

Not his lack of capital, his limited experience or even his cancer diagnosis could discourage then-27-year-old David Caruso from launching an event-planning venture when he felt the time was right. He had a good prognosis, and a good feeling.

"Medical bills were high, and I didn't have a lot of business, but I knew it wasn't something that was going to take my life," said Caruso, who discovered the cancer in its early stages. "You're doing something you're excited about, but you're thinking, 'How am I going to go about getting through this and starting a business?'"

He founded Dynamic Events Inc. in 2002 with an \$8,000 loan from his wary parents, a \$30,000 line of credit and a wealth of favorable market research. The competition mainly consisted of older women with modest home-based operations.

"My approach was definitely to kick it up a notch, in every way," he said. "I really wanted to make an impact on this profession."

Five cancer-free years and scores of grand galas later, his good timing has become evident. Bookings have grown from about a dozen small affairs in his inaugural year to more than 40 events annually, from glamorous private parties and weddings to major charity fund-raisers and corporate celebrations. Caruso has hired two additional full-time event coordinators to keep up with demand.

"It was tough, starting out in Milwaukee. A lot of it was just educating people on what it is to work with an event coordinator and what our services are," he said. "I had to work really hard selling my talent, my creative talent as a person, and to get people comfortable enough with me to

trust me with their special events."

His first gig was a small yet stunning wedding. Referrals began trickling into his office, a Third Ward suite with a deliberately dynamic crimson interior.

Among his most cherished successes is one of his most creatively challenging feats: a formal dinner for 1,400 celebrating the 100th anniversary of Local 494 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Caruso re-created historic Milwaukee with professionally rendered facades of landmark buildings, "paperboys" distributing newspapers heralding the union's creation and a German band playing music.

"I was honestly a little nervous about this event. I wasn't sure how my normal creative sense would be accepted, but if you listen to what (clients) like and what's important to them and create something that reflects their ideas — with perhaps a few extras — they're very receptive to your professional expertise," Caruso said. "We created a very exciting environment for a group of people that most likely have not and will not experience another such event in their lifetime."

His education in television

broadcasting and visual communication, combined with marketing experience and theater background, help him devise his elaborate visions. And he's continually delighted when they turn out as imagined.

"I have a very wild mind. The biggest challenge I run into is making my ideas become a reality. They are often very technically challenging," Caruso said. "Milwaukee has a lot of very snazzy event-goers, and you constantly need to stay on top of the trends and introduce new elements. What's important to me is that when people attend our events, it's like nothing they've ever been to before."

Bonding with clients is inevitable while planning their weddings, milestone birthday parties and other life celebrations. But his presence at Milwaukee's A-list events doesn't translate into a blooming social life.

"I am very privileged to have a lot of extraordinary people — business associates and friends and family — surrounding me, but my social life is very much dictated by my work," Caruso said. "I'm often working on evenings and weekends, and very long hours. It's probably not the recommended balance, but for now it makes me happy."