

NEWS

Tenacity more than just a buzz word for Hampton woman

BY MADELEINE L. ADAMS
Special to Inside Business

Sometimes fate delivers roadblocks you have to adjust to as a business owner. If you cannot adjust, the consequences may include going back to working for someone else.

Kimberly Toms of Hampton knows this all too well. She owns Roulez Media of Chesapeake; the obstacles she encountered during her company's startup are the subject of an upcoming full-length documentary film.

"I was starting Roulez Media near Chicago in 2013," Toms said. "I had just moved there from the West and wanted to get to know the area while building my new digital marketing agency, along with an e-commerce venture. The previous corporation I worked for as chief marketing officer had been sold, so I was on to the next business plan."

That's when Toms walked into a restaurant and her life changed forever. "I tell people I walked into that restaurant for a margarita and

walked out with a highly empowered stalker," she recounts. "I still have never gotten that margarita."

The stalker she is speaking of was a supervisory special agent for the U.S. Department of State. Toms thus began a two-year struggle to rid herself of the threatening person who started digging into her auto registration, Social Security account, credit and other background information. He watched her through her electronic devices, knowing what color dress she was wearing or precisely when she arrived at a location hundreds of miles from him.

"It was the proverbial television slasher movie kind of activity," she said. "But it was real life. It was my life." The federal agent committed several serious crimes against her over a year, while threatening her life if she told authorities. It was when he found out she was fleeing his home state in April 2014, that he set her up to shoot her.

"That is when I realized I needed to flee and find protection that I

had been unable to gain up until that point," Toms said. "I fled first to Currituck County, North Carolina, and later to Hampton. All the way from the upper Midwest to this region, police did not seem to believe the crimes were happening. So I finally went to Washington, D.C., right to the U.S. Department of State."

It was there Toms finally found help. An investigation was opened and the agent's badge and gun were revoked. Early in the investigation, it was acknowledged by her state department investigator the person stalking and hurting her had a history of those types of offenses.

Another woman was filing a restraining order against the man at the same time as Toms' case launched in Washington. The offender also had at least three other police reports filed against him. This led to formation of a joint task force around the matter.

As she is awaiting the formal closure of the case through the State Department this summer, Toms is finally getting to launch the business she had to put on hold due to the crimes.

"I'm so pleased that I'm finally getting my life back. I started using my name in public just a few months ago and can actually say, 'I'm Kimberly Toms and I own Roulez Media.' I can actually start taking on clients, launching projects and building everything I intended to build four years ago. I can be part of a community and get to know others, now that I'm officially out of hiding."

Roulez Media is ironically named. "Roulez" in French – a throwback to Toms' New Orleans roots – means, "We roll forward." She smiles as she explains this.

Roulez joined with Uptone Pictures of Wake Forest, N.C., for a retelling of Toms' story in an upcoming documentary film. "Escaping Fed" is scheduled to be shot in Hampton in late September.

Local talent Leah Martin will play the role of Toms' rescuer and heroine, Special Agent Kerri Hartman of the State Department. In the film, Toms will recount the crimes and her flight to Virginia, where her offender continued to track her.

"It is an interesting story but one I'm ready to put behind me with this documentary," Toms said. "I hope it shows the tenacity and spirit that drives business owners to do what they love, against the odds," she said.

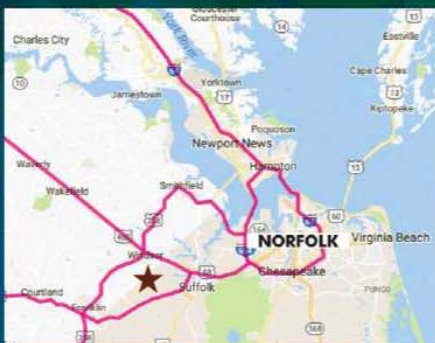
To learn more about Escaping Fed, visit the film's website at EscapingFed.com. Learn more about Roulez Media at RoulezMedia.com. The production has an IndieGogo campaign to raise the last \$40,000 needed to ensure the film is completed and gains national exposure.

"I'm still quite apprehensive about the threats from my offender," Toms said. "But I am so excited for the future and still believe everything happens for a reason. I see I am as strong as I believed and can honestly say, entrepreneurial tenacity is a real, tangible thing."



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