

Commercial Real Estate · The Boss

The Boss: TDK Cos.' Tim 'Timbo the Tangler' Keach loves going fast



Tim Keach is chairman and CEO of TDK Cos.
ADAM SICHKO | NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL



By Adam Sichko – Senior Reporter, Nashville Business Journal
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TDK Construction Co. Inc.
Murfreesboro, TN
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Tim Keach's dad did not want him to go into his construction business. Keach not only did that, he transformed it into a developer that has created more than 10,000 apartments across the South. Walking horses first brought Keach to the area. Now, TDK Cos. has projects in West Nashville, Gallatin, Franklin, Antioch, La Vergne and his backyard of Murfreesboro, now the second-fastest-growing city in Tennessee. Whether in his boat, his jet or his car, Keach loves to go fast. But his dad taught him construction isn't that way. "I respect craftsmen. You just don't snap your fingers and something gets built," he says.

What was your first job, and what did it teach you? My first job was holding the target rod for shooting elevations and grades. ... That's where I learned to cuss.

Did your dad want you to go into construction? My dad had planned for me to be a doctor [or veterinarian]. He wanted a "better" life for me. Anything but construction. ... My dad's love was farming. We had a sizable operation of cattle, hogs and crops that we grew. I enjoyed that, but I really thought if I was ever going to make a better living, that construction would probably be better. I told my dad that I wouldn't be going to medical school. He said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I was going to come home and work for you." He said, "That wasn't the deal!"

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When did you decide to form a business? We incorporated in 1983. We were watching the Winter Olympics. There was a Japanese company [sponsoring the Olympics] that made cassette tapes; its name was TDK. My dad looked up at the TV and said, “Look, there’s our name. TDK: Tim and Dorris Keach.” A lot of people think it’s my initials, but my middle initial is G.

What brought you to Tennessee? I went to University of Kentucky one year, and then transferred to [Middle Tennessee State University]. The walking horse industry kind of brought me to this area. We had some very good horses that we raised and trained. There were more shows here and better horses. My dad later switched to thoroughbreds. He passed away in 2009 and wanted me to keep racing. We’re down to one filly, the last of the lineage.

You’re opening a hangar at the Murfreesboro airport next month. What do you find rewarding about flying? It’s a business tool: I couldn’t run a business in eight states without it. As long as I’m able, I’m going to be on every job site we have at least once a month, if not twice a month. We fly two or three days a week. We may go to Oklahoma early in the morning, then to Dallas about lunchtime and back home by 5 or 6 at the latest. I have a very young company; I’d say the average age is the early 40s. They have children in sports, school programs, community and family events. They can’t do that if they’re sitting at an airport in Dallas, waiting on a flight. I’m sure there are some in our company who say we’d have bigger bonuses if Tim didn’t buy a \$10 million jet, a \$3 million hangar. But in the scheme of things, it helps everybody.

You fly for fun, too, I’m sure. I’m always doing business, you know? My dad’s theory was that everything was work. Now, if there just happened to be pheasants to hunt where you were working, that’s OK. He called it “funnin.” ... We’re on our second Citation jet and hoping to trade for our third sometime this year. You know, once you start, it’s always got to be bigger, faster, higher.

What’s your favorite getaway? My place in South Dakota is my favorite home away from home. I have 1,200 acres, all tillable. It’s my place in the world where I’m very much at peace. My place out there is set up kind of like a hunting lodge. I’ll sit out there on the farm and shoot coyotes. They kill a lot of pheasants. We also hunt prairie dogs for fun. That’s long-range shooting: We’ll shoot them up to 600 yards away, with sniper rifles.

What’s something your co-workers would be surprised to know? When I was selling pharmaceuticals, I was living in Amarillo, Texas. There was a professional wrestling show there. Wrestling was huge in Texas back then. All the wrestlers lived at the same apartment complex. They recruited me to be an apprentice wrestler.

Did they give you a name? Since I was from Kentucky, they said, “What about the Kentucky Colonel?” I said I was really more of a Tennessean. So they suggested “Timbo the Tangler.” That one stuck.

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You've been critical of your alma mater's athletics department. What's compelled you to be outspoken? I am happy. My frustration as an MTSU fan is, I think we could do so much more. For a school of our size and our resources, we've left some performance on the table. I've been very open: I think the heartbreak of myself and a lot of our MTSU fans was the loss of Kermit Davis, our basketball coach. While we were very happy for him, our school should have elevated him to a comfortable level, to where he would have never entertained leaving. My passion about MTSU is the same way I am with business. I'm usually a pretty low-key guy. But once I get into something, I don't let go until I get it corrected or running the way that I want it.

Age: 69

Title: Chairman and CEO

Company: TDK Cos.

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Employees: 32

Hometown: Henderson, Kentucky

Education: Middle Tennessee State University, bachelor's in animal science