

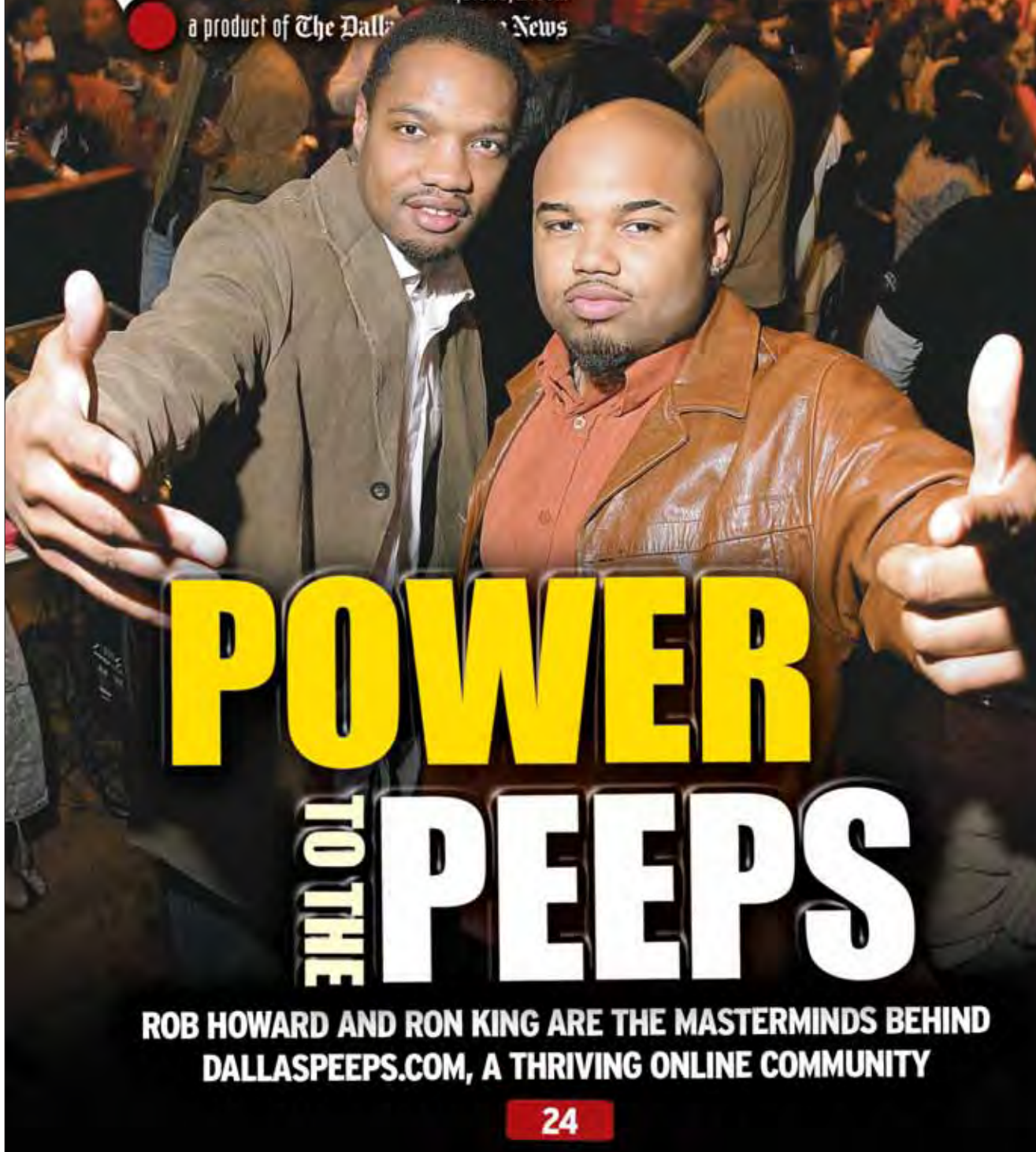
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POWER TO THE PEEPS

ROB HOWARD AND RON KING ARE THE MASTERMINDS BEHIND DALLASPEEPS.COM, A THRIVING ONLINE COMMUNITY

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CLARKSON SINGING NEW TUNES

To give her smash 2004 album *Breakaway* one last push before she heads back into the studio, Kelly Clarkson will hit the road this summer on her Addicted tour. On the road, Clarkson plans on debuting new material intended for her third studio album, according to her spokesperson. The Addicted tour will stop in Houston and San Antonio, but not Dallas. *Billboard*

'Peeps' making noise online

DIG INTO DALLASPEEPS

So what else can you do on DallasPeeps.com? Here are a few options:

- Find a church.
- Post your modeling portfolio.
- Watch streaming music videos.
- Coming this summer: an online reality TV show that follows K104 radio personality Cat Daddy around Dallas.

Before MySpace and Friendster, there was DallasPeeps.com.

The sprawling online community — aimed at young people with an urban lifestyle — lets visitors network, browse nightlife options, search for jobs, create a Web page and listen to local rap and R&B artists.

Last month the site drew more than 10 million hits — a number that still shocks its founders, Dallas natives Ron King, 24, and Rob Howard, 29.

"It was scary how fast it started," Howard said. "We did a couple of advertisements on the radio. But I guess the streets passed the word."

The start-up was rough. King and Howard maxed out credit cards and took out loans to create their vision. These days, the site makes money through advertising and the sale of upgraded memberships.

In February, the two launched HoustonPeeps.com, the second in what they hope will be a long line of Peeps sites.

The spot is definitely making connections: Ten couples met through Peeps and got married.

Here's more from the duo.

Lesley Téllez

Q: You started this in 2001, before MySpace and Friendster existed. How did you know this was going to be profitable?

Howard: We didn't even go into it thinking this would be a profitable business. We went into it thinking it was going to connect our friends and connect the people that we didn't know.

Q: Did your parents help you with start-up costs?

King: No. Actually, my parents were against it.

Howard: My parents were, too. Nobody in my family really knows anything about computers, so they were like, "How do you make money off of that?"

Q: Why do you think it's so popular?

Howard: I ask myself that every night. [laughs]

King: It's actually bringing different lifestyles together. ... If you want to find someone who's going out, you can find someone. If you want to find someone who's

COVER STORY



JASON JANIK/Special Contributor

The early days of DallasPeeps.com weren't easy for Ron King (left) and Rob Howard, but now they're enjoying the taste of success.

at home and wants to talk, you can find someone. You can always feel at home.

Howard: That was our motto: Connecting communities, creating opportunities.

Q: Do you ever worry that people won't think it's cool anymore?

King: People drop off. They think they outgrow it. But they'll come back a year later.

Howard: It's like a revolving door.

Q: What Web sites do you visit for fun?

Howard: I don't check out any.

King: For us, if we're not on our own Web site, messing with it, then we try to get off the Internet.

RON KING

Age: 24

Education: Trinity Christian High School graduate; studying marketing at the University of North Texas

DallasPeeps role: Handles marketing.

Marital status: Single

Motivation behind the site: "It's not the money. It's the stories. It's the people coming up to you when you're at random places, saying, 'Hey, thank you so much, I got my business started.' Or, 'I started going back to school.' That's the payment."

ROB HOWARD

Age: 29

Education: Skyline High School graduate; bachelor's degree in public administration from the University of North Texas

DallasPeeps role:

Founder/developer. By day, he's a Web programmer for May Advertising in Fort Worth.

Marital status: Married to wife Sonja and father of a 1-year-old son, Robert IV.

On bringing DallasPeeps to life: "When we started, Ron had a head full of hair. Mine is slowly going to go away. This consumes our life. We just dedicated ourselves to doing something to put Dallas in the limelight. I think we've accomplished that."

Site helped a member become a model

DallasPeeps.com helped launch the career of Lashontae "Tae" Heckard, who currently appears in the movie *ATL* with rapper T.I.

Heckard, a Duncanville native, joined the site in 2001 to meet other people her age. She posted pictures of herself and was inundated with requests from photographers to shoot her modeling



portfolio.

"I wasn't really looking into modeling or anything like that, but it was easy," Heckard said. "I was like, well, maybe this is a different avenue for me."

Heckard has since moved to Los Angeles and appeared in videos for Kanye West, Ludacris and 50 Cent. She was named *Vibe* magazine's 2003 Video Vixen of the Year.

Lesley Téllez