

WE DEFINE THE *Future*



PRESS RELEASE

9-14-20

Contact: Mike Singer

(760) 341-2883, ext. 78107

msinger@csusb.edu



Brian Esser and Kelly Schoenfeld hold up a map of the U.S. with pins in every city where their customers are using their Lightning MD software

CSUSB Palm Desert Campus alumni create two successful businesses together

PALM DESERT, Calif. – CSUSB Palm Desert Campus alumni Kelly Schoenfeld and Brian Esser were out singing karaoke one night about five years ago when they decided to start a medical billing business together.

The two men have a few things in common: both graduated with a bachelor’s degree in nursing from CSUSB and both were selected as the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus Outstanding Undergraduate Student the year they graduated (Schoenfeld in 2012 and Esser in 2013). They have remained close friends since graduation.

After graduating from CSUSB, both went on to be RNs at hospitals in the Coachella Valley — Schoenfeld worked at Desert Regional Medical Center in the Trauma ICU unit and Esser worked with stroke patients at Eisenhower Medical Center. Esser also won the “Nurse of the Year, Tech and Innovation” award in 2016.

A few years later, after deciding to start this new business together, both studied medical billing for several months. After they felt they had a handle on things, they recruited their first physician client. Schoenfeld says, “the catalyst for us was to prove that we could build a successful business, and we certainly wanted to be our own boss.”

Their hard work paid off and their company, ESC Medical Billing, opened in 2015 and currently serves clients in the Coachella Valley and the Los Angeles area.

After starting ESC, the two said that they felt that the medical billing software they were using was “fairly horrible.” Esser has strong programming skills and thought they could do better. The two were able to raise \$175,000 for a second business, Lightning MD. Current products for this company include a telehealth app and practice management software. This new software took nearly two years to complete and went live in February 2020. They say they are quickly building a subscriber base across the nation and breaking into a billion-dollar industry.

“Lightning MD is growing rapidly and we have plans in place for building an Electronic Medical Record and mobile apps,” said Schoenfeld. “It’s really exciting stuff. We are working on raising \$1 million within the next six months.”

“Things have slowed down for our doctors during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Schoenfeld. “But thankfully we are considered essential and we are doing fine. We continue to grow despite the pandemic.”

Schoenfeld and Esser credit the CSUSB nursing program for providing them with new skill-sets and after completing the program, which they say was very hard to do, they both felt that they could accomplish anything.

“Despite not knowing much about medical billing or software development, we both believed we could learn anything we needed along the way,” the two said. “The confidence boost from our education played a large part in the beginning, and still does even now. We know that no matter how difficult something is, if we work hard enough, we will not only get through it, but also excel at it.”

Schoenfeld and Esser offer this advice to current college students who want to start a business:

“It is important to have a good support system and believe in yourself. Most importantly, do your research and make sure you are filling a niche that will set you up for success. Find investors to help financially, if possible. The first year is very tough and the more support you have, the better. Your confidence must be absolute, and you must work harder than you ever have before. Be committed to it because growth is always uncomfortable.”

Even after being in business together for more than five years, the two say they remain best friends and share the same vision. “We are definitely on track to create something special!”

For more information about each business, visit the ESC Medical Billing website at <https://www.escbilling.com> and the Lightning MD website at <https://www.lightningmd.com>.

The CSUSB Palm Desert Campus offers bachelor's and master's degrees, a doctorate in educational leadership, and teaching credentials and certificates. With more than 1,600 students, it is the Coachella Valley's four-year public university and plays a vital role in educating and training the region's growing population.

For more information about the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, contact Mike Singer in the Office of Strategic Communication at msinger@csusb.edu or (760) 341-2883, ext. 78107, or visit the campus website at www.csusb.edu/pdc.