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GRAND VALLEY DEALER TOUR

Thinking big on the 'best slope'

Could Colorado's Western Slope become the next hub for industry companies?

By Lynette Carpiet

Tim Fry arrived in Grand Junction in 2000, buying a small distributor called Bicycle Parts Pacific, and he hasn't left the Grand Valley since.

Originally from the Midwest, it didn't take Fry long to become enamored with the more than 300 days of sun and proximity to the mountains and outdoor recreation, from skiing and hiking to biking and fishing.

"We can do everything in the Valley and we're within two hours of the best ski resorts in the country and probably the world. The number of fourteeners you can climb ... coming from the flat Midwest, it's a little different," Fry said.

It also helps that the Grand Valley has been a friendly environment in which to grow his drivetrain, suspension and component brand, MRP.

"We're a tiny company but we're in a community that really values the fact that we export 50 percent of our products from here," said Fry, president and CEO of MRP. "They value the impact we have," he said.

So Fry has remained loyal to the Grand Valley. He now chairs the Grand Junction Economic Partnership (GJEP) board, made up of 24 people employed in various industries including banking and health care. Fry is the only representative from the bike industry, but he recently recruited another executive from the outdoor industry to serve on the board.

GJEP has been around since the 1980s, and even longer than that in different formats. The nonprofit stemmed out of an effort to diversify the local economy and jobs in response to a decline in the energy industry. Funded by the Grand Valley's municipalities and counties as well as local companies that serve as investors (including MRP), GJEP is tasked with recruiting and retaining businesses in the region, which includes Fruita, Grand Junction and Palisade, and other smaller communities in Mesa County.

Over the past three years, outdoor recreation has become a primary focus for GJEP.

"Each year at our strategic planning session we decide what the target areas are," Fry said. "As far as outreach efforts, where are we going to put emphasis on outreach? And outdoor recreation has been one of the top three focus areas."

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The Colorado National Monument draws half a million visitors annually. A popular road loop for local and visiting cyclists can be accessed from Fruita or Grand Junction.

For a video of the Grand Valley Dealer Tour, go to www.youtube.com/user/bicycleretailer

GRAND VALLEY DEALER TOUR

Over the Edge Sports

Number of employees: 11 full time, plus as many as 5 part time seasonally

Store size: 2,400 square feet

Sales emphasis: High-end mountain bike rentals and sales

Years in business: 22

Main brands: Trek, Rocky Mountain, Ibis, Pivot, Santa Cruz, Juliana, BMC, Knolly, Evil

Owners: George Gatseos, Ross Schnell

When Rondo Buecheler and Troy Rarick founded Over the Edge Sports in 1995, the small town of Fruita, Colorado, had zero association with mountain biking. But the partners started building trails — without consent from land managers — and are credited with laying the groundwork for making Fruita the mountain bike mecca it is today.



Rental bikes are at the ready in front of Over the Edge Sports in Fruita.



Co-owner George Gatseos (left) and general manager Landon Monholland

Buecheler exited the business in 2006, opening Rapid Creek Cycles in nearby Palisade (see shop profile on page 18). Rarick sold OTE Fruita in 2010 to early employees George Gatseos and Ross Schnell, the latter a longtime mountain bike racer for Trek.

Over the Edge also has locations in Sedona, Arizona; Hurricane, Utah; South Lake Tahoe, California; and Melrose, Australia. Those stores are operated by independent owners under a licensing agreement with Rarick, who retains rights to the Over the Edge name.

Visiting all five locations has become a bucket-list pursuit for devoted fans, said Landon Monholland, general manager at the Fruita shop.

"In 2010, when I started here, a lady came in and kissed the floor and she said, 'I finally made it.' And I realized what power that had, and what an effect it was on her life to finally get to ride in Fruita. A lot of those stores are bucket-list places because the riding is so amazing," Monholland said.

The Fruita shop boasts a rental fleet of more than 100 high-end mountain bikes to serve the legions of dirt



Over the Edge sells a wide range of shop-branded apparel and accessories.

junkies who come to town each year to ride the 18 Road area — where Rarick and Buecheler started out building early trails — Kokopelli Loops and other legendary trails. Gatseos estimates that tourists account for 90 percent of the store's total business.

"Our goal here is just to create an awesome experience," he said.

"We make vacations come true," Monholland echoed.

Additionally, Over the Edge's giant selection of shop-branded merchandise — from T-shirts, jerseys, socks and ladies' undies to pint glasses, flasks and bottle openers — keep the cash register ringing with high-margin sales while the shop techs provide speedy turnaround on visitors' bikes in order to salvage their vacations.

"Because they're so shocked they're going to get their bike back in an hour, they mill around and shop, and that's where your high-margin stuff comes into play. They're just piling jerseys and shorts on the counter," Monholland said. "So the back of the store facilitates the front ..."

"... and the front facilitates the back," Gatseos continued. "It's kind of like a mullet." **BRAIN**

The Board & Buckle Ski & Cyclery

Employees: 8 total; 5 full time

Store size: 2,500 square feet

Sales emphasis: Ski rental, service, boot fitting and tuning; bike rentals, service, sales

Years in business: 46

Main brands: Norco, Fuji, GT, Phat Cycles

Owner: Davis Finley

Grand Junction isn't a big ski town, but visitors who head out to Powderhorn Mountain Resort will rent gear or have their skis tuned up at The Board & Buckle, the Grand Valley's longstanding ski/bike shop combo.

"You bring it, we can fix it," said store manager Kent Foster. And he's got the expensive stone grinders and machinery to do the job. The ski workshop has all sorts of hand sanders and custom boot fitting tools.

Bob Sisac started the business in 1971 as a ski shop that sold trampolines, skateboards and even installed swimming pools. It wasn't until the late '80s that bikes came into the picture.

Foster, who has worked at the store since 1979 and is a cousin of Sisac, said sales today are evenly split 50/50 between skis and bikes. But ski is more seasonal. The cycling side of the business is strong for nine months out of the year.

In a small farmhouse building, the store has a 40-foot trailer in the back where it stores its ski rentals, while bikes hang on hooks and are parked on racks on the store's porch and front lawn.

In its early days The Board & Buckle carried Bridgestone and Diamondback, and at one point was a Giant dealer. These days, Norco is its main mountain bike offering, along with Fuji for road and some mountain, and GT for BMX and full-suspension trail bikes. Its bike sales skew toward the trail, with mountain making



Manager Kent Foster has worked at the store since 1979.

up 50 percent of sales, 25 percent road and the rest a mix of hybrids and BMX bikes.

Perhaps surprisingly for a mountain town, fat bikes haven't really taken off.

"There's a Nordic trail system on the Mesa and they don't want bikes there," said Foster about fat bikes.

The Board & Buckle is a family-oriented shop. Its high-end offerings are in the \$2,000 to \$3,000 range, and Foster said this is where sales are up so far this year.

"We're selling bikes to kids and now they're married and having their own kids," he said.

Grand Junction is a tight-knit community, and Foster said the shop has relied on its reputation for service to stay in business. That and the development of trails by COPMOBA (Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association) and growth in collegiate cycling at nearby Colorado Mesa University have helped establish a strong bike culture in the Grand Valley. **BRAIN**



Founded in 1979, The Board & Buckle is housed in an old farmhouse in Grand Junction.



The shop's business is split evenly between ski and bike, but cycling sales are less seasonal.

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GRAND VALLEY DEALER TOUR

Ruby Canyon Cycles

Employees: 5 full time, 3 seasonal/part time

Store size: 6,000 square feet total; 5,000 showroom, 1,000 storage

Sales emphasis: High-end carbon mountain bikes; service

Years in business: 30

Main brands: Specialized, Yeti

Owner: Ryan Cranston

Ryan Cranston is a fan of electric mountain bikes, specifically of Specialized's Turbo Levo. And coming from a former mountain bike racer, it's a credible endorsement of e-MTBs.

The father of a 3-year-old and a 5-month old, Cranston has limited time to ride and given the choice of riding his Yeti on non-moto trails or the Levo, he'd pick the Levo as he can still get a workout and cover more ground in less time. So it's no surprise that the Levo is front and center in his store.

Cranston said he went to the Specialized Turbo Levo launch in Moab last year. "They've sold better than I thought," he said, noting that the store sold seven or eight Levos in 2016.

E-MTBs have opened his store to a more diverse clientele including hunters, older buyers and customers who have had quadruple bypasses. There are more trails open to e-MTBs than not in the area, he said.

Cranston acquired Ruby Canyon Cycles from the store's second owner seven years ago. He had worked at the shop from 2000 to 2005, then worked at local manufacturer MRP before returning to the shop as owner.

Ruby Canyon Cycles is a mountain bike store at its core, with the bulk of sales in high-end carbon bikes priced from \$3,000 to \$8,000. Most of its bread and butter is in the \$4,000 to \$5,000 price range. 29ers are



The store sold several Specialized Turbo Levos last year. E-MTBs have helped it draw in a more diverse clientele.

the movers, but 27-plus came on strong starting in October of last year.

"Five- to six-inch trail bikes are king here," Cranston said.

The area is unique because of its rough, rocky trails. It's known as a hotbed of mountain biking, so there's a big enthusiast base. "That puts us in a bubble. There's huge demand for bikes here," he said, explaining how there could be so many bike shops in the Grand Valley, though population is only about 150,000.

Cranston's target market is locals. He doesn't sell online and advertises in a local magazine. With product sales going online or direct from manufacturers, he has put a sharper focus on expanding service, including suspension



Suspension repair and service is a focus of the business, which is also expanding into moto and ATV service.



Ryan Cranston, a former mountain bike racer, acquired Ruby Canyon Cycles seven years ago.

repair and service of Fox and RockShox — and is starting to do moto and ATV service, wheel-building and fitting.

2016 was a record year for the store, which was up almost 10 percent compared with the previous year. So far this year, he's up 8 percent over 2016.

"Road is our biggest area of growth potential. It's less than 10 percent of sales," he added.

The BRAIN Dealer Tour visited his shop just days before the Grand Junction Off-Road, which brings in out-of-town traffic and increases transaction count at his shop on Main Street in Grand Junction. "It brings in large-margin sales we wouldn't get without the event," he said. **BRAIN**

Colorado Backcountry Biker

Number of employees: 6

Store size: 1,800 square feet

Sales emphasis: Combines hut-to-hut trips with enthusiast-level mountain bike sales and service

Years in business: Hut trips for 13 years, retail for about 4

Main brands: Devinci, Yeti, Nirve, Transition

Owners: Kevin Godar, Tony J. Uriguen

Colorado Backcountry Biker began as a hut-to-hut mountain bike tour operator and has grown into a retailer housed in a refurbished historic hotel just off

Fruita's central traffic circle, a stone's throw from Over the Edge Sports.

Co-owner Kevin Godar has run the hut trips since 2006. He owns the transportable huts, which initially were located on National Forest land on the Uncompahgre Plateau, southeast of Fruita. The huts are now positioned on private land on the plateau. Riders can rent the fully stocked huts and ride between them on three- or four-day self-guided trips, without the need to carry food or bedding. CBB often provides rental bikes for the trips, which have been written up in *National Geographic Adventure*, *Outside Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal* and other publications.

The partners expanded from rentals into full-service retail about four years ago, setting up shop in a building that was established as the Park Hotel in 1898, and completely remodeling it in the off-season last year. The first stage of the remodel opened up the downstairs sales room and service area and reused original materials as much as possible. The next stage includes remodeling the



Kevin Godar (left) runs CBB's hut trips, while Tony J. Uriguen oversees the retail and bike rental shop.

hotel rooms upstairs, which will allow the building to continue its historic use.

Rentals are still a large part of the business, but the small shop also offers sales, clothing and accessories, including a wide array of branded clothing, from socks to shirts.

Urigen said the shop keeps its rental fleet in rotation in part by selling any rental bike any time of the year. Many shops sell their rentals at season's end, but by selling throughout the season, the rental fleet remains in prime condition, he said.

The store also builds community with locals and frequent visitors by hosting group road and mountain bike rides and operating the CBB Cooler — a patio hangout with a bike wash station and seating for post-ride food and drink. It also happens to be a short walk to a liquor store. **BRAIN**



Colorado Backcountry Biker remodeled its space, a historic hotel, during the offseason last year.



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Rapid Creek Cycles

Number of employees: 3

Store size: 1,600 square feet

Sales emphasis: Bike sales, rentals and service for enthusiasts, beginners and wine tours, as well as paddleboard sales and lessons

Years in business: 10

Main brands: Ibis, Niner

Owners: Rondo Buecheler, Scott Winans.

Can lightning strike twice in the Grand Valley? The founders of Rapid Creek Cycles are hoping to help the town of Palisade diversify its economy and grow a community around cycling and watersports, as has occurred in Fruita over the last two decades.

Palisade, 16 miles east of Fruita on I-70, is a slightly different world: While Fruita's economy has surfed the highs and lows of the gas business, Palisade has a growing reputation as home to nearly 20 wineries. Palisade-grown peaches are also treasured by fruit lovers across the state.

The town has easy access to a section of the Colorado River that is ideal for paddleboarding. And while the mountain bike trails are more limited than Fruita's, the Palisade Rim Trail is well-known. Regional officials and Rapid Creek's owners are actively planning to build the Palisade Plunge, a long shuttle-ride descent that would put the town firmly on the map of mountain bike destinations (see story on page 20).

Rapid Creek Cycles has a diversified income flow. It rents high-end mountain bikes, as well as hybrids and e-bikes for winery tours. It also sells and rents paddleboards and gives lessons. Co-owner Rondo Buecheler, a longtime river guide, leads trips and cocktail cruises on the Colorado in flat-bottomed dory boats.

The owners say their goal is to nurture the growth



Co-owner Rondo Buecheler also founded Fruita destination mountain bike shop Over the Edge Sports.

of the community. Buecheler is well-known as the co-founder of Over the Edge Sports in Fruita, the shop credited with establishing that town as a thriving mountain bike destination. Winans wears many hats: He's the vice president of engineering for Grand Junction's MRP and the president of Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association (COPMOBA), one of the few trail associations inducted into the Mountain Bike Hall of Fame.

"This isn't a plan to get rich," Buecheler said. "We can make a good living with the store here, but that re-



The shop opened 10 years ago in the small town of Palisade, 16 miles east of Fruita.



Kayaks and paddleboards complement bikes on the shop floor at Rapid Creek Cycles, located close to the Colorado River.

ally isn't the point. It's about community involvement and development. We want to see the store be a part of a growing community here." **BRAIN**

Brown Cycles

Number of employees: 7 full time, plus some seasonal hires

Store size: 4,500 square feet

Sales emphasis: Family, sub-\$1,000 mountain bikes, used bikes

Years in business: 17

Main brands: Trek, Bianchi, Electra, Surly

Owner: Chris Brown

Brown Cycles accomplishes the rare feat of appealing to longtime bike nerds without alienating beginners and those who are more casual about riding. The shop seems to do this on the power of owner Chris Brown's personality and the staff he has brought in around him.

Shoppers in Grand Junction's historic downtown area are drawn in by a large and varied sidewalk display of bike bells, and inside they'll find an array of bike-related knickknacks, including a few rarities the store has acquired on eBay. The store even buys vintage clothing at thrift stores and has it embroidered with the shop name, for resale and for employee wear.

"It took me 15 years to figure out that I should sell impulse items," said Brown, who said he sells about 600 bells a year.

Casual visitors won't be intimidated by the shop's bike selection, which features an array of mountain bikes in the \$400-\$700 range, which Brown said hit the



Owner Chris Brown also has a business making tandems and triplets that accommodate kids.

sweet spot of quality, value and practicality.

But Brown has cred with enthusiasts as well. The store keeps a huge inventory of tire sizes, giving riders no reason to go online to search out their obscure needs. Brown's vintage bike museum has some gems, and the "Dirty-Brown Cycles" used bike area is full of conversation starters.

"People bring us weird things," Brown said.

Brown also has a side business, KidzTandems, which offers handmade tandems and triplets that position small ones up front, with the rear-most rider controlling the steering and braking. The tandems can be converted to cargo bikes after the kid outgrows them.

Chris Brown constantly shares his enthusiasm for bikes and cycling, hosting a weekly local radio show and a weekly newspaper column. The shop hosts an array of fun group rides. Events include the Mountain Bike Shoot Out, where participants bring a gun, a mountain bike and a sleeping roll for a rowdy campout on BLM land west of the city. The shop also promotes the Cowboy Slam Cycle Poetry night, a Mom Ride and, for creative bike nerds, the One Bike competition and expo, where participants vie to create an omni-purpose vehicle. **BRAIN**



The shop caters to both enthusiasts and casual cyclists.



Brown Cycles is located in Grand Junction's historic downtown.

GRAND VALLEY DEALER TOUR

Bicycle Outfitters

Number of employees: 7 in Grand Junction; 2 at Montrose location

Store size: 4,500 square feet (Grand Junction location)

Sales emphasis: High-end mountain sales and rentals; gravel, road and kids' bikes

Years in business: 25

Main brands: Santa Cruz, Felt, Scott, Salsa, Rocky Mountain, Pivot, Intense

Owner: Brad Stewart

Road bike sales have been down in the dumps at Grand Junction's Bicycle Outfitters. So why is owner Brad Stewart preparing to open a road specialty shop and fit studio in a space he has directly across the street from his shop that has been killing it in the mountain market the past year?

"I think it will come back again, surge again. You'll



Bicycle Outfitters has been in five different locations over the years. It has been in its current 4,500-square-foot space since 2012.

see three or four good years of road bikes, and then mountain bikes will be flat," Stewart said.

Stewart, a Grand Junction native who grew up racing BMX in the 1970s, went into business 25 years ago selling used bicycles. He now carries 10 different brands, including high-end MTB suppliers Santa Cruz, Pivot and Intense. His average bike sale comes in around \$4,500.

He also operates a second location in Montrose, about an hour southeast of Grand Junction, that is run by a retailer he previously bought out in the town of Delta. "I don't have to do anything. I just give him bikes and let him run it," Stewart said.

Business has been robust this year, on par with 2014, Stewart's best year ever, he said. That puts him 30 percent ahead of 2015 so far.

After getting in too deep financially with a prior supplier years ago, Stewart began paying COD for as many bikes as he can.

"If you don't have the money, you don't buy it," he said. "You should see the discounts I get. We were running at 40, 42 [percent margin]. Now we're at 46, 47. Those are good margins. So you can negotiate: 'I'll take all that at once and write you a check.' We're doing that with about 90 percent of our inventory."

Rentals remain busy, with about 10 bikes going out per day, according to Stewart. It's a market he's still trying to resolve between visitor rentals and people genuinely interested in demoing with intent to purchase, Stewart admits.

"That's a place we can really step up

to the plate a bit if we have more rentals and demos. Everybody wants to demo a bike now, instead of renting. Not demo to buy one; they just want a high-end bike to ride. We've actually raised our prices for demos from 90 bucks to 120 bucks, because when we demo a bike we want people to buy a bike from us, not just ride a bike from us," he said. **BRAIN**



With 10 different bike brands, selection is deep at the Grand Junction shop.



Owner Brad Stewart got his start selling used bikes.

The Bike Shop

Number of employees: 7 full time, 3 part time

Store size: 4,500 square feet

Sales emphasis: Full-line, full-service shop

Years in business: 23

Main brands: Cannondale, Giant, Liv, Pinarello, We the People, Free Agent, Santana, Co-Motion, Niner

Owners: Ash Jordan, Bryan Miick

Softgoods sales are a perennial challenge at The Bike Shop in Grand Junction, sales manager and co-owner Ash Jordan admits. So when his Pearl Izumi rep recently visited and offered to rearrange and spruce up that section of the store, Jordan said to let 'er rip.

"We don't have time to do that. We don't think merchandising all the time. We're thinking of how to repair bikes and what bikes are the best to bring in and what's going to meet our customers' needs the best," he said.

The retailer's roots date back to 1954, when it opened as a hardware store in the Coast to Coast regional chain. Bikes were added to the product mix later.

But when major home improvement chains like Home Depot started looking to move into Grand Junction in the early 1990s, "it was time to get into the bike business full time instead of it just being part of the store,"

Jordan said. It relaunched as The Bike Shop in 1994.

Jordan said the retailer prides itself on offering same-day or next-day service, so he and co-owner Bryan Miick keep a deep stock of parts on hand. They also take advantage of having key distributors nearby.

"Having Quality and J&B Importers in Denver helps a lot. J&B's a day away even if I order at 4:30 in the afternoon. Quality is sometimes a day away, sometimes two days away for parts on regular ground shipping, so that makes a big difference in trying to



The Bike Shop began as a hardware store in 1954. It switched exclusively to bikes in 1994.



Co-owner and sales manager Ash Jordan said The Bike Shop still runs newspaper ads three days a week. "That goes to 50,000 people each day. There's nothing else that gives us that top-of-mind awareness," he noted.



The retailer has carried Cannondale since 1997, and added Giant and Liv last year.

turn repairs quickly," Jordan said.

He also tries to always order above thresholds for free or cheap shipping. "Shimano's is \$500, and our average order there is \$800 from them," Jordan said.

Unlike most retailers in the Grand Valley, The Bike Shop does not offer rental bikes for visiting mountain bikers who come to the area to ride Fruita's network of legendary trails and Grand Junction's Lunch Loops system, or road riders who want to bike the Colorado National Monument.

"We're closed on Sundays, so it's difficult to do rentals," Jordan said. "You almost need a separate staff to do rentals — somebody to handle all the reservations, someone to do the checkouts and check-ins, and two or three people to handle maintenance on rental bikes." **BRAIN**

Continued from page 13

Thinking big

Fry said it's not only him driving that agenda, although he's a loud voice at the table.

"The community leaders within Palisade, Fruita and Grand Junction have identified this as a focus," he said. "We tend to be energy dependent — a lot of oil and gas extraction happens in this part of our state. Our local economy can boom and bust dependent on the energy cycle. And there's a pretty concerted push right now to diversify, and one segment of that is tied to attracting more outdoor industry-related companies."

GJEP offers businesses relocating or already running a business in the Valley a variety of perks including local, state and industry-related tax incentives, from a tax holiday for up to eight years to tax credits for specific business operations such as hiring new employees, to rebates for personal property tax and waiving of sales and use tax on manufacturing consumables. It also offers cash incentives for capital expenditures and job creation and provides relocation assistance.

Its incentive packages have helped recruit advanced technology and manufacturing businesses such as Colorado Clean, a bio-plastics manufacturer, TSW Analytical, an Australian forensic intelligence company, and Pro Star Geocorp, which develops software for use by the oil and gas industries.

"It's helped us attract more tech-oriented companies and some of those advanced industries that might not look into this area," said Cilia Kohn, marketing director for the Grand Junction Economic Partnership. "But as a state, in Colorado we want to become the hub for outdoor recreation from a business and personal standpoint."

And as such, the state and the Grand Valley region both offer several grants and programs to promote that development. Outdoor recreation businesses already contribute more than \$300 million and more than 2,000 jobs to the economy of the Grand Valley.

Fry recently applied for a state-funded accelerator grant and his company was selected as one of the awardees out of 124 applicants along with 14 others. The grant is tied to projects that are proven and at a certain stage, and the grant dollars are to get it to the next level.

"This is the first time we applied for it and we were fortunate to be awarded," Fry said. "I learned about it through GJEP and worked with the GJEP office in preparing our grant application and going through

the process."

The contract for the grant with the state wasn't finalized at press time, but Fry said the program allows up to a \$250,000 grant and requires that MRP match it, putting up \$2 for every \$1 of grant money. That's seed money for MRP to develop a new patented suspension fork for mountain bikes, and the grant is awarded through the Colorado Economic Development Commission.

Outside of the Denver metro area and I-25 corridor, the Grand Valley is the state's next-biggest population center. Denver has grown so fast that the cost of housing and wages have gone up in recent years, as well as traffic congestion, making it tougher for small companies to locate there. And while the Grand Valley is still a small community, with a population of 150,000, Fry said it has certain amenities, such as a large health care network, not typical of a community its size.

"Whether you talk about Eastern Utah or Western Colorado, we're a medical hub with two major hospitals — one with a high-level trauma center," he said. "So you kind of have the benefits of a small town but some of the luxuries of a bigger community."

With the upcoming expansion at Salt Lake City's airport, domestic and international travel options will increase with direct flights to Asia and Europe. And the SLC airport is a short flight from Grand Junction's regional airport. The number of daily flights to Salt Lake is also up, as well as daily flights to Denver, Phoenix and Dallas.

"It's getting better. When I first moved to Grand Junction, every plane was a prop plane. Now we have little jets," Fry said.

Sarah Shrader, co-founder of Bonsai Design (*see story on facing page*), which is working with the city to build an outdoor recreation business park near the Colorado River, is also excited about the transformation happening in Grand Junction, which at one point was referred to as "Junk Town" because of the amount of trash dumped by the river. Over the past two decades there's been a cleanup effort, she said, and a recognition of the natural resources in its back yard.

"We're really excited to see this community take the next leap," she said. "You see this in places like Ogden, Asheville, Bend and Boise that sort of had the death grip in one industry and decided they wanted to diversify themselves, and we're really seeing that now."

"This community is poised to be the next awesome place to live, work and play," she added. **BRAIN**

A deeper Plunge into MTB tourism

The 30-mile-long Palisade Plunge project is the latest example of how 'trail creation is really economic development' in the Grand Valley.

By Toby Hill

PALISADE, Colo. — Colorado's Grand Valley is a tight-knit coterie of small towns that often acts as one community, according to Scott Winans. And nowhere may that be more evident than with the Palisade Plunge trail project, a planned 30-mile-long "world-class singletrack" that will start at an elevation of 10,700 feet atop the Grand Mesa and descend more than 6,000 feet to the 1-square-mile town of Palisade, population 2,700.

"The Palisade Plunge is going to be one of those draws that just helps you advertise the region. Somebody comes here to ride the Plunge, but they're going to spend the next three days hitting each of our main trail networks here. And that is not lost on the city of Grand Junction and the city of Fruita and the town of Palisade. All of those municipalities are tied into the planning and working with land agencies to get the trail built," said Winans, president of the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association (COPMOBA).

Like trail projects COPMOBA has previously undertaken in Fruita, Grand Junction, Ridgway and other Western Colorado towns, a primary driver behind the Palisade Plunge is strengthening the local economy by bringing in new tourist dollars.

"The trail creation is really economic development. In Fruita, it sort of took the city a good decade of seeing this growth of expensive bikes on top of cars and finally digesting that this was a really good idea. And we're doing a similar thing here in Palisade," said Winans, who also co-owns Rapid Creek Cycles & Paddleboards in Palisade and works as vice president of engineering for Mountain Racing Products (MRP) in Grand Junction.

Part of Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper's "16 in 2016" initiative (renamed to "Colorado's 16") to prioritize 16 trail projects throughout the state last year, the Palisade Plunge could begin construction as soon as spring 2018, opening to users in 2019 or 2020.

The trail will originate at an existing trailhead currently used primarily in winter by snowmobilers, and will be designed for riders of moderate skill level. "When you put 30 miles of continuous trail together, even at a moderate skill level that's a big undertaking for the vast majority of riders," Winans said.

Since the trail starts on U.S. Forest Service land atop the Grand Mesa, the agency will have the authority to permit shuttle operators. But riders will also be able to self-shuttle or even climb the Plunge, since it will not be a one-way trail.

So far, the project has hinged on cooperation and compromise. The proposed route

winds through lands managed by a half-dozen agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, the municipalities of Grand Junction and Palisade, and the Department of Transportation.

For COPMOBA, which has built about 90 percent of its trails on BLM land, the project presented a new level of complexity.

"We've been doing trail projects for nearly 30 years as COPMOBA, and to have a project that involves that many entities is very rare. So it's been a huge undertaking," Winans said.

Katie Stevens, field manager in the Grand Junction office of the BLM, says COPMOBA's history of building consensus with land managers has helped push the project along. "The thing that's different about them is they decided early on they weren't going to be super combative and were just going to focus on getting the problems out of the way. I think that serves them really well on this project too," she said.

Palisade's granting agency is currently funding the Plunge via two grants totaling \$115,000, plus \$5,000 from private donors, and the town has hired consultants Edge Environmental to conduct an environmental study.

"We go up and flag the route and all 'ologists' make sure we're not disturbing the things we shouldn't be," said Rich Sales, Palisade's town manager.

The town has also requested construction funds from Great Outdoors Colorado, which funds outdoor recreation from state lottery revenue. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$2 million.

But what kind of return will that investment yield — not only for Palisade, but for the greater Grand Valley?

Tourism is already the linchpin of Palisade's economy, centered around its wineries, peach farms and numerous festivals, notes Juliann Adams, executive director of the local Chamber of Commerce. She estimates the Plunge could bring an additional \$1.9 million a year into the town's economy.

"We are anticipating that this Plunge trail, because of its epic scale, is something that's going to be an international draw," Adams said.

For the Grand Valley region, Winans conservatively estimates the economic impact at \$5 million annually.

He compares the scale and nature of the Palisade Plunge to Moab's Whole Enchilada ride or the Monarch Crest Trail near Salida, Colorado, but with one key difference: "All of these start at a 10,000-foot-plus elevation and end down in river valleys. But none of those end at a town where there are facilities to provide lodging, food service or tie into the local viticultural or agricultural experiences we have here." **BRAIN**

GRAND VALLEY DEALER TOUR

Guest Editorials

Tour is a window into cycling collaboration in Grand Valley

This spring I was invited by the sales team at Garmin to join them on our first Bicycle Retailer Dealer Tour in Colorado's Grand Valley. Coming from the engineering team, I work daily with the technology and visit shows, but have limited opportunity to experience the bike business where it really happens — at the retailer. Visiting nine retailers in close proximity over three days, I was impressed with the diversity each store had, given the overall importance of mountain biking to the region.

The Grand Valley is a bucket list location for riding. We were generously hosted and guided throughout by the Grand Junction Economic Partnership. Recognizing the value that cycling has for the area, there is an impressive level of collaboration between the local government, trail associations, land management and bicycle retailers to provide trail development and access. Many of the retailers we visited support the "1% for trails" initiative, tacking an additional percent onto sales to fund trail work. This is something that I think other regions could learn from. I believe the Dealer Tour experience will spur discussion on how Garmin can advance the mountain bike features in our wearables like the fenix 5 and vivoactive HR.

Since everyone on the tour was connected somehow to cycling, one evening we went around the table describing our first experiences on a bike. I was inspired by the stories each person had of what being able to ride a bike allowed them to do. I thought about this feeling of freedom when we visited Colorado E Bikes and listened to employees share inspiring stories of building custom electric bikes to give people with disabilities this same feeling.

Overall, the topic of e-bikes brought diverse perspectives at each stop that were interesting to me — given that Garmin has recently added features to support e-bikes. The consensus at the stores was that e-bikes have a valuable place in cycling, and numerous people pointed out that there are more areas that are open for e-bikes than not.

On the Dealer Tour, we all pedaled bikes (not an e-bike among us) from dealer to dealer. The weather was beautiful the first day and atrocious the next two days, but I can assure you that we all share in the delight that only cycling can bring, and wish to perpetuate this with our dealers and customers.



Ross Stirling
Director of engineering
Garmin

Recreation, promoting business go hand in hand on Western Slope

Cyclists are often familiar with Colorado's Grand Valley as the host of events like Tour of the Moon, the Grand Junction Off-Road or the Fruita Fat Tire Festival. Some may even fly into our airport and spend a few nights in Fruita before hitting the Kokopelli Trail, 18 Road or the Colorado National Monument. But few make the time to explore the rest of the region.

So, it's an understatement that we were excited when BRAIN welcomed the idea of hosting a Dealer Tour here. It was an opportunity for us to show that we have more to offer than VRBOs, gas stations and the Hot Tomato (although as a reformed New Yorker, I would challenge you to find better pizza anywhere outside the tristate area).

The Grand Valley has long been a rest stop for bike tourists. But recently, visitors are finding reasons and opportunity to stay. This is in part thanks to support from Gov. John Hickenlooper and Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Industry Office, which has taken genuine interest in growing regional economies across the state. With their support, the Grand Valley has extended river-front trails to carry you from one end of the Valley to the other, as well as built new trails unlike anything you've seen elsewhere in the country, such as the planned Palisade Plunge. The governor has also implemented new programs that allow us to support new and small business, including the Rural Jump-Start Tax Credit program, which started right here in our county and offers eligible businesses a tax holiday for up to eight years.

Another, less tangible reason people love our Valley is its spirit, which at just under 150,000 in population still holds fast to its small-town roots, happy to welcome newcomers and stretch hands across the table to anyone who wants to experience what it truly means to live on Colorado's "best slope."



Cilia Kohn
Marketing director
Grand Junction Economic Partnership

Grand Junction business park aimed at creating outdoor hub

By Steve Frothingham

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. — The Grand Valley is already home to a variety of bike and outdoor industry suppliers, in addition to being a destination for many road and mountain bike enthusiasts. Now the region is making a bid for more outdoor industry with a new business park planned for the north shore of the Colorado River.

Grand Junction is home to MRP, the suspension and drivetrain brand that also owns Kreitler Rollers, and DT Swiss also has a facility in town. Both companies owe their existence in the region to Bicycle Parts Pacific, a distributor that relocated from San Diego to Colorado in 1988 and later was renamed MRP. Ski lift company Leitner-Poma and Loki Outdoor Clothing also are based here.

Now the Grand Junction River District business park is being developed by Bonsai Development in cooperation with various local, regional and federal agencies. Bonsai Development is an offshoot of Bonsai Design, a Grand Junction company that de-

signs and manufactures "aerial adventure" zip-line courses.

Local officials say the region is ideal for outdoor suppliers due to its many employee-enticing recreational opportunities, including skiing, river running, cycling, climbing and more. Grand Junction also has a low cost of living, an airport with direct connections to major hubs, proximity to I-70, and freight and passenger rail lines.

Bonsai was looking for a new headquarters because its current space is being redeveloped. It was being courted by several other regional communities, including Ogden, Utah, before deciding to work with the city to design and anchor the new riverside business park.

Bonsai is leasing 4 to 4½ acres from the city for \$20,000 per year over 25 years. The city has pledged incentives worth \$117,000 over 10 years, while the state will provide \$75,000 in cash incentives to support new job creation.

Bonsai expects to employ a total of 50 at the facility; the company's economic impact is expected to be about

\$20 million a year on the community.

The business park is at the west end of Las Colonias Park, a Grand Junction city park just north of the Colorado River that will eventually include an amphitheater, a lake, a dog park, volleyball courts and, of course, an aerial adventure park. The busi-

Local officials say the region is ideal for outdoor suppliers due to its many employee-enticing recreational opportunities, including skiing, river running, cycling, climbing and more.

ness complex will have 10 to 15 acres of sites available for businesses in the outdoor recreation industry, including light manufacturing.

Bonsai will handle the design of the business park, which will include features available to all companies located there, such as a centralized

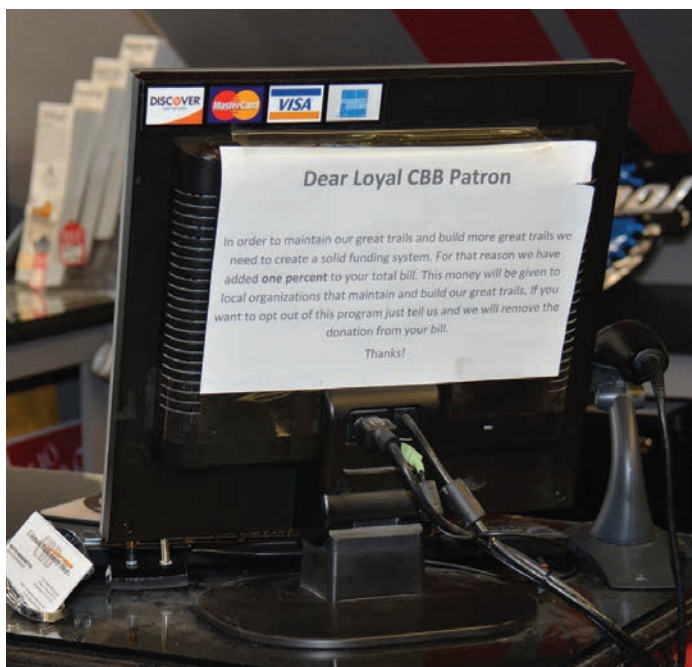
green space, outdoor meeting zones, reservable conference rooms and training spaces, and expandable warehouse sections.

Sarah Shrader, Bonsai Design's chief administrative officer, said that despite the temptations to relocate, the company wanted to stay in Grand Junction partly because of the area's manufacturing resources. The region has a long history supporting the oil and gas industry and has many available fabricators, welders and other metal and plastic workers. Shrader said finding a location where Bonsai could set up an aerial course adjacent to the headquarters was also a priority.

"We decided after traveling around for a couple months that we wanted to create a really cool Google-like outdoor recreation business park here in Grand Junction," Shrader said.

Paul Aieta, Bonsai's general manager, is a bike industry veteran, a former executive at MRP and DT Swiss, and is helping the company get the word out about the business park to the bike industry. **BRAIN**

GRAND VALLEY DEALER TOUR



Colorado Backcountry Biker adds 1 percent to a customer's final bill, which it donates to local trail building organizations.



Some of the artwork displayed on Brown Cycles' store walls include paintings by a local artist and various vintage pumps.



Our group rode some bonus miles after the first day of shop visits in Grand Junction up the Colorado National Monument to the first overlook at Cold Shivers view point.



The tire display at Brown Cycles pokes fun at the wheel debate. In the Grand Valley, plus-size tires are quite popular, retailers said.



Benny, a Labrador puppy, was the center of attention at our visit at Colorado E-bikes. Stay tuned for a full recap of our visit in our upcoming e-bike market report in our July 15 edition.



An employee at The Board & Buckle's rental shop drew this up, which made it onto the shop's jersey.

GRAND VALLEY DEALER TOUR



Fruita City Manager Mike Bennett and Mayor Lori Buck joined the tour on Day 2 in their city.



Scott Winans, co-owner of Rapid Creek Cycles in Palisade, holds up the Mountain Bike Hall of Fame Award given to the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association, of which he's president.



MRP hosted a reception at its headquarters on the final day for the BRAIN Dealer Tour and local shops that included a tasty BBQ and a three-piece band (right). The bass guitarist is an MRP employee.



Clowning around on a six-rider Longbike owned by Brown Cycles



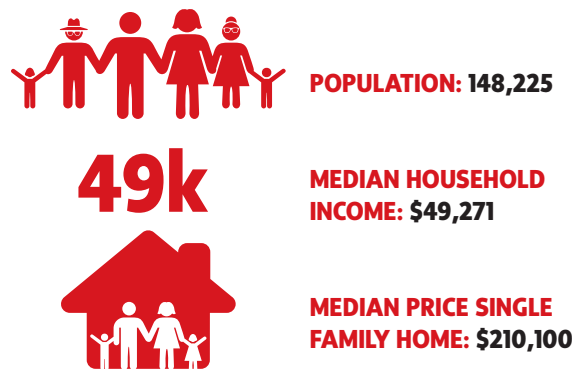
Over the Edge Sports carried the widest range of store-branded goods.

OUTDOOR BIZ in the Grand Valley



Source: Mesa County Workforce Center/Outdoor Recreation Coalition

FACTS AND FIGURES

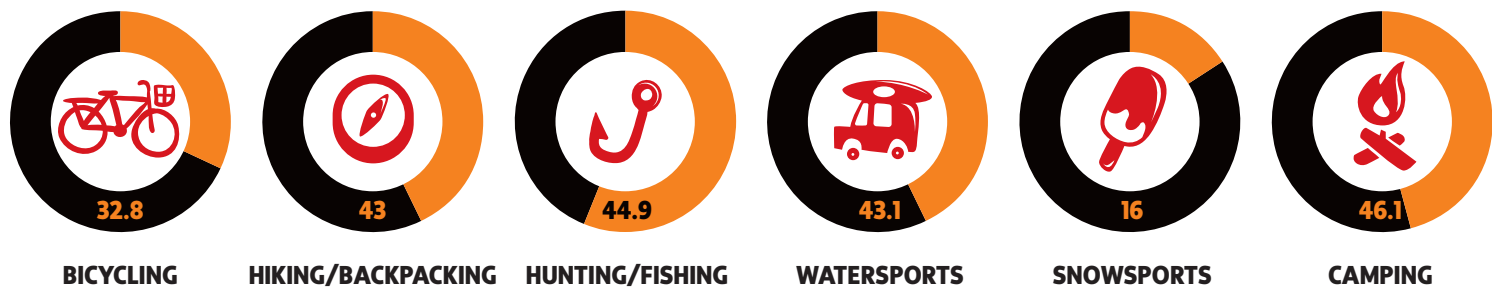


Source: Mesa County, 2014, U.S. Census Bureau

WITH MORE THAN 10,000 miles of trails, the Grand Valley is known as the “trails capital of Colorado.” It includes well-known areas such as 18 Road in Fruita, the Kokopelli and Rabbit Valley trail systems on the west side, and Lunch Loops, close to downtown Grand Junction.

AN OUTDOOR PLAYGROUND

In the past 12 months, Grand Valley residents participated in:



Source: Nielsen Scarborough Market Study of “Adult Mesa County Residents”

Dealer Tour outtakes

Things overheard during BRAIN’s three days in the Grand Valley ...

“The Internet has never built awesome trails to ride.”

— Over the Edge Sports general manager Landon Monholland, on the retailer’s heritage establishing mountain biking in Fruita



“How is it? Is it worth the calories?”

— David Shoemaker of Dealer Tour sponsor Garmin, pondering whether to indulge in the empanadas during the welcome dinner at Grand Junction eatery Tacoparty

“The first thing you’re going to want to look at is the color ...”

— Derek Goltz of Dealer Tour sponsor Finish Line, showing off his sommelier training during lunch at Grande River Vineyards in Palisade



“Students have a lot of money when they first get to college and get their loan disbursement or their financial aid. And then that money’s gone within the first two weeks, and all the money left is for pizza and beer. Not much left to buy bicycles.”

— The Bike Shop co-owner Ash Jordan, on why the 10,000-student population at nearby Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction isn’t a stronger customer base

GRAND VALLEY DEALER TOUR



No dirty talk here: Acronyms "WTF," "MILF" and "FU" translate to "Welcome to Fruita," "Man I Love Fruita" and "Fruita USA" at Over the Edge Sports.



Kokopelli and dinosaur art at Brown Cycles in Grand Junction



Tanya Dueri and her company Jett Digital caught the Dealer Tour experience on video for BRAIN. To view the video, go to www.youtube.com/user/bicycleretailer.



The Hot Tomato is the place to be for pizza, salad, beer and wine after a day of mountain biking in Fruita.



Town mascot Mike the Headless Chicken gets a place of honor in Fruita's downtown.



Grand Junction's regional airport plays up the Grand Valley's opportunities for mountain biking, wine, golf and river running.



BRAIN features editor Val Vanderpool loves chunky trails like Horsethief Bench at the Kokopelli Loops outside Fruita.