



1% For The Planet program
makes a major impact

Small number, big difference

BY AMY MAY

For Highline Partners, being “green” doesn’t just mean installing solar panels and low flow toilets. The Big Sky-based specialty homebuilders make a point to give back to the earth by donating one percent of their annual net profits to local environment-focused non-profits as a part of the 1% For The Planet program.

This year, Highline Partners donated over \$8,000 among three local non-profits: the Blue Water Task Force, Red Feather Development Group and the Gallatin Valley Land Trust.

When owners Todd Thesing and Rob McRae mapped out the business plan for Highline Partners, they knew that sustainable housing and green building would be their focus.

Thesing added, “And if we’re impacting the land, we should be giving back.”

1% For The Planet is a grassroots organization inspiring businesses to give one percent of their annual sales to environmental cause groups. Yvon Chouinard, founder of Patagonia, and Craig Mathews, owner of Blue Ribbon Flies in West Yellowstone, hatched the organization in 2001.

Mathews said he originally came up with the idea to self-tax in the 1990s, when Yellowstone National Park was losing funding.

“The idea hit me. If every business in West taxed themselves one percent, then we could basically fund the park ourselves,” he said.

Todd Thesing, co-owner of Highline Partners, believes the 1% For The Planet program is worthy of his financial support.

Mathews then took the idea and published it in Blue Ribbon's annual fly catalogue, attempting to embarrass his competition and fellow business owners into joining the cause.

Mathews said his friend Chouinard had been doing the same thing with his company, Patagonia, as well.

The two came together and created 1% For the Planet in 2000. The program has slowly been building to 1,200 current members.

In Big Sky, McRae and Thesing became aware of 1% FTP after reading Chouinard's book, "Let My



Rob McRae's love of the outdoors is expressed in a concrete way with his contribution to the 1% FTP program.

People Go Surfing." While the book focuses on freedom in the workplace and innovative approaches to running a business, Thesing admitted he was caught by the catchy 1% logo.

In 2008 Highline Partners donated \$1,056 to Blue Water Task Force. McRae and Thesing chose BWTF because of their mutual love of the Gallatin River, McRae being an avid fisherman and Thesing a kayaker.

Kristin Gardner of Blue Water Task Force said this year the donation was greatly appreciated due to a decrease in support from the local resort tax dollars. She said she anticipates that this year's donation will go to the water-sampling program.

Also a recipient of Highline's one percent, Bozeman-based Red Feather Development Group partners with American Indian communities to address housing needs. Its programs include teaching communities to use straw bales to create a sustainable building material for homes.

"Teaching someone to use the resources they have is great. Kudos to them," Thesing said.

Faye Kommers of Red Feather Development said Highline's donation will ultimately go towards building a home for a Native American family.

With the program founder living just down the road in West Yellowstone, Thesing said he is little surprised that so few people in Big Sky are aware of the program.

"I think a lot of local businesses contribute to non-profits on their own. But the 1% program makes you accountable," Thesing said.

For Mathews, giving back to the environment is simply a matter of responsibility.

"No business can be done on a dead planet," he said. "The government won't do it. They can't do it. So it's up to the businesses to step up and protect the planet."

In 2006 Mathews and Chouinard decided to create the first local chapter for 1% FTP in Jackson, Wyo. Within months, the community counted 50 businesses involved in the program.

Mathews said he believes the Bozeman-area would be ripe for another such local chapter. He expects 1% FTP will launch a Bozeman chapter in the next few years. Bozeman already has six contributing members and 17 non-profits involved in the program.

"This area would be perfect for a local chapter," Mathews said.

For more information on 1% For The Planet, go to www.onepercentfortheplanet.com.



The Red Feather Development Program builds homes for Native American families.