

Project Utopia



Photo by David Gibb | www.dgibbphoto.com

TALENT, OR - Craig Bramscher, president of the innovative electric motorcycle company Brammo, did an exhaustive study he called "Project Utopia" to find the ideal place for his next business.

"I was living in Malibu when I sold my last business. I was interested in starting a manufacturing business and looking for a place to raise my family. Finding some work/life balance was real important to me because I'd been going at it for seven or eight years non-stop.

"I looked at every place west of Denver," says Craig. "Southern Oregon had the right blend of culture and small-town life. It's a great place for clean technology, alternative energy, organic foods—anything that lends itself to sensitive thinkers and innovative people. And Southern Oregon is developing into a hotbed for environmental solutions."

by Chris Cook

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"Everybody feels like we're on a mission to do something big, and it feels like we're pulling that off. It's never as fast as you want it or as easy as you'd like it to be, but everybody at Brammo is very proud of what we do here in Southern Oregon."

- Craig Bramscher, President

Project Utopia

Craig Bramscher is a serial entrepreneur who doesn't pull any punches. After his company DreamMedia went public in 1997, Craig decided to move his family away from Malibu, California. He had a well-conceived plan he called "Project Utopia," and it landed him in Ashland, Oregon. Southern Oregon had that right balance of culture, safety and cost of living—and lots of places to fly fish and ride motorcycles. "I was living in Malibu when I sold my last business," Craig recalls. "I was interested in starting a manufacturing business, and looking for a place to raise my family. I had two kids when we moved up here, and we have four now. Finding some work/life balance was really important to me because I'd been going at it for seven or eight years non-stop."

Craig began what he called "Project Utopia." "I did a survey of about 100 cities, and I cut it down to 50 that I visited." It took him almost a year, and the Rogue Valley was one of the last places he visited, but once he arrived, his mind was made up.

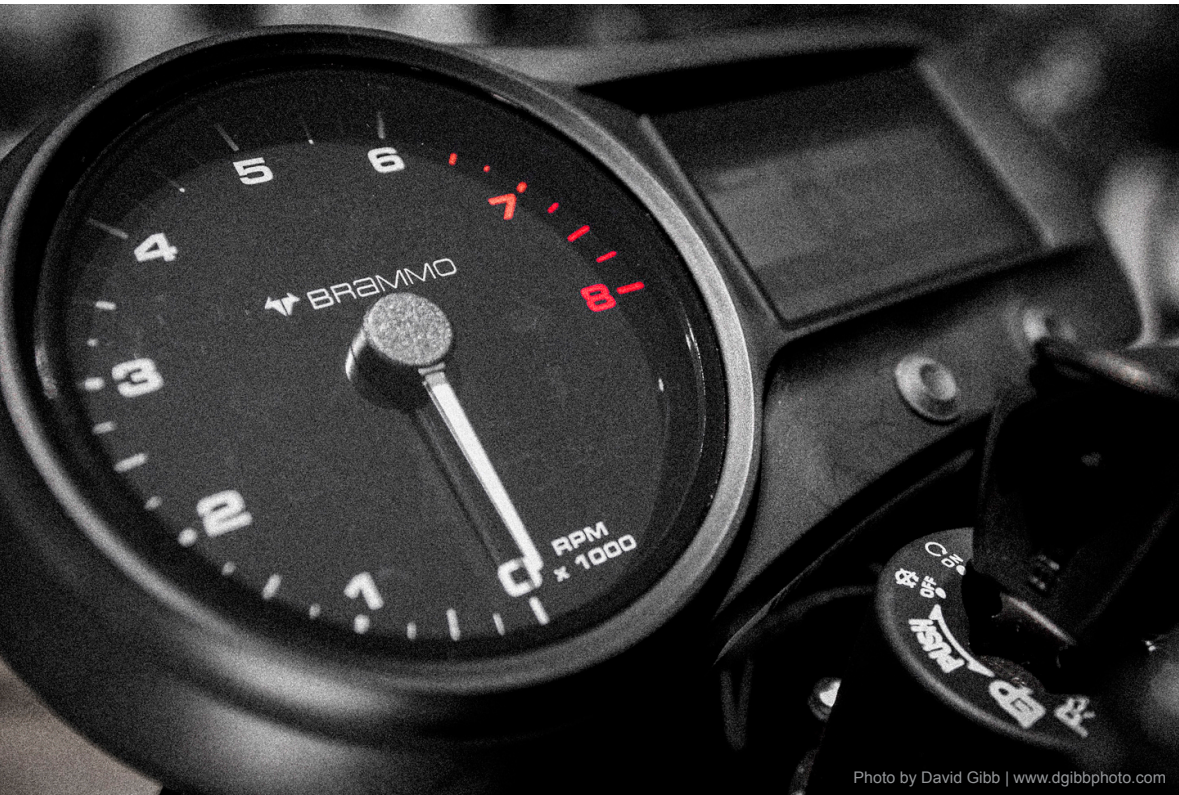


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After starting in Craig's garage, Brammo Inc.'s headquarters and manufacturing are now located in a 100,000-square-foot former Wal-Mart building in Talent, Oregon. According to Charged Electric Vehicles Magazine, Brammo is currently the world leader in producing electric motorcycles. Three bikes have been developed so far—the Enertia, an entry-level motorcycle; the Empulse, a sport bike on par with a Ducati; and a race bike, with speeds up to 170 miles an hour.

The company is still growing and making strategic partnerships. "Through our partnership with Polaris,

we expect to bring some really exciting products to market," Craig confides. It's still in the early stages, but I see a great, long-term relationship." Brammo also partners with Flextronics for green boards and silicon wafer chips. "We design the technology. They produce it, and then we assemble the bikes in Talent," he says.

Building his staff of more than 60 employees was easier than Craig imagined. "For most of the technicians, and assembly, there's a skilled and abundant workforce in the valley. We do a lot of prototyping and we've found that the local workforce has the necessary skills," Craig says. "However, there are a limited number of electric vehicle engineers in the world, so we definitely have to reach a little broader than the valley for some of that talent. If they're looking for any kind of a great quality of life and a reasonable cost of living, then we can get them. If we can get them to come visit, they usually get hooked. For example, an advanced engineer probably has or is starting a family, and so they're looking for all the quality of life issues as well as a great job. And it's a gorgeous place to ride bikes, so we make sure everybody gets out on a bike if they can ride. It's a beautiful area."



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Superheroes Invade Southern Oregon



Photo by Jim Craven | www.jimcravenphoto.com

MEDFORD, OR - Ask Adam Cuppy, Trever Yarrish, and Sean Culver why they're building a coding company in Southern Oregon and they respond with, "Why not?" Then inquire about their firm's 1,400 percent growth in just over two years and they smile and say, "Great, right?"

The Medford-based company, Coding ZEAL, is a global web and mobile application development firm. With a focus on agile development, pair programming and lean methodologies, the Coding ZEAL partners have discovered their edge. And their 11 employees enjoy being on the edge with the firm's superhero-inspired branding and extraordinary zeal, or as they call it, "gross unadulterated enthusiasm."

They are not naive. They are not first-time business owners. In fact, the partners were entrepreneurs before they created Coding ZEAL. Adam and Trever, former Dutch Bros. marketing and creative directors, started a Grants Pass marketing company in 2007, and Culver spent time in Thailand where he headed up a cutting-edge development project. Former founder and partner Robert Head was a senior engineer at Amazon.com and Pivotal Labs in San Francisco.

Choosing Southern Oregon as their headquarters was easy. "In this industry you can be anywhere and work with anybody," Trever says. "We're here because we love it."

by Chris Cook/Karen Fronek

Trever Yarrish, Sean Culver, and Adam Cuppy
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"If you get down to the logistics of it, we're equidistant between Portland and San Francisco. As a tech company, you almost can't be better placed than that. We're right up the I-5 corridor so shipping and accessibility is as good as it is almost anywhere in the country."

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Choosing Southern Oregon as their headquarters was easy. "In this industry you can be anywhere and work with anybody," Trever explains. "We're here because we love it."

From their downtown Medford office, Coding ZEAL team members have worked on projects for a variety of companies, including Amazon.com, Pivotal Labs, Mavenlink.com, SweetHigh.com, SilverCloud, Inc., Dutch Bros. Coffee, Scratch-It.com, One Site, Iterate.io, Argen Corp, Wonderful.com, VIP PetCare, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Long Distance Voter, Sleadd and ZipLineGear.com

Adam says he sees an unbelievable amount of opportunity and potential in Southern Oregon. "If you get down to the logistics of it, we're equidistant between Portland and San Francisco. As a tech company, you almost can't be better placed than that. We're right up the I-5 corridor so shipping and accessibility is as good as it is almost anywhere in the country."

As for finding skilled programmers? "I think that because the environment and culture here are so great, you're going to easily attract talent. We get people who are tired of a 45-minute drive to work." Adam smiles, adding, "The other thing is that we have nearly 300,000 people here and there's a cultural and social pace to Southern Oregon that is very diverse depending on where you are."

The Coding ZEAL team was able to share that diversity with a group of 55 digital artisans from four countries at the 1st Rogue Rails Conference in October 2013. The "Open Space Agile Summit" shared best practices in pair programming and other agile development concepts with participants from Facebook, Pivotal Labs and Railscasts—all industry thought leaders.

According to Trever, that kind of sharing is common in Southern Oregon. He explains it like this: "As an entrepreneur, or somebody starting or running a business, you benefit from a feeling of community and of sharing. Business owners want to talk, they want to share, they want to learn and connect with each other. Other places I've been, there's a feeling of secrecy, standoffishness or inaccessibility because it's just harder to make it there."

Coding ZEAL is just one of many global companies whose leadership has chosen to embrace a culture of "Why not?" in Southern Oregon. Others include Harry and David, Motorcycle USA Superstore, Lithia Auto Stores, Brammo, Carestream Health, Linx Technologies, Met One Instruments, Quantum Innovations, Darex and Rogue Valley Microdevices to name a few.



Adam Cuppy, Partner and COO of Coding ZEAL talking about the value of the integration of corporate culture, creativity, and collaboration in the high-tech sector.

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National Business Local Balance



Photo by David Gibb | www.dgibbphoto.com

MEDFORD, OR - The principals at Ogden Roemer Wilkerson Architecture came to Southern Oregon for the lifestyle and stayed for much more.

Ken Ogden “fled” from Los Angeles 20 years ago after a close brush with a gang-related drive-by shooting. He loves living in a place where he can ski, kayak and hike.

Jim Roemer left San Diego for Southern Oregon 19 years ago. A life-long and avid outdoorsman, Jim travels the world in search of new adventures, but says that nothing compares to the natural beauty of Southern Oregon and the wonders of Oregon’s coast.

David Wilkerson was working in Manhattan with a three-hour commute to Long Island. Already feeling that he didn’t want to start a family with his New York lifestyle, September 11, 2001, sealed the deal. Now he and his family live in a “four-season outdoor paradise” where they can ski, bike and go boating, depending on the season.

by Chris Cook

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National Business Local Balance

The principals at Ogden Roemer Wilkerson Architecture came to Southern Oregon for the lifestyle and stayed for much more.

Ken Ogden “fled” from Los Angeles 20 years ago after a close brush with a gang-related drive-by shooting. He didn’t mind leaving the four-hour-a-day commute either. He loves living in a place where he can ski, kayak and hike. “It’s the best move we’ve ever made,” says Ken. He and his family with two young boys moved to a small farm near Ashland with horses, sheep and chickens—a setting that reminded him of his childhood home in England. Instead of LA’s emphasis on materialism, his kids did chores and learned responsibility and consequences for their actions, while having the freedom to roam the hills.

Jim Roemer left San Diego for Southern Oregon 19 years ago. He shares the love of outdoor recreation with his partners. Their office philosophy is “work to live, not live to work.” As an avid lifelong outdoorsman, Jim travels the world in search of new adventures, but says that nothing compares to the natural beauty of Southern Oregon and the wonders of Oregon’s coast.



David Wilkerson was working in Manhattan with a three-hour-a-day commute to Long Island. Already feeling that he didn’t want to start a family with his New York lifestyle, September 11, 2001, sealed the deal. It was great fortune that the meeting he was to attend that morning in the World Trade Center had been moved to the next day.

Now he and his family live in a “four-season outdoor paradise” where they can ski, bike and go boating, depending on the season. “There’s an extraordinary culture of volunteerism and shared values,” David says. “So many families around me are doing the same things. We are connected on many levels. We are on boards together, and coach each other’s kids’ athletics. We are connected to the community, our clients and colleagues.”

What all the partners found upon moving to Southern Oregon was a place that offered the best of everything — a cosmopolitan feel in a small city, world class arts and culture, quality medical care, great weather, boundless outdoor opportunities, a talented workforce, a supportive business climate and truly nice, genuine people who care about one another.

Specializing in design for commercial, educational, civic, medical and residential projects, Ogden Roemer Wilkerson Architecture is the largest architecture firm in Southern Oregon and is licensed in eight states. As part of their services they guide clients through development and permitting processes. In terms of development and permitting in Southern Oregon, “The people we are dealing with are genuine people,” Ken says. “They are willing to help versus being caught up in bureaucratic sterility. There’s not all the red tape that you find in larger areas, so the cost of development is less.

“I love the collegial respect that businesses have for one another,” Ken adds. “We help each other out, give advice when asked, care and respect one another. I still have clients in LA so I travel there regularly, but I can’t wait to fly back into our valley.” Ken’s partner David agrees wholeheartedly. “Just because we live in a small city doesn’t mean we have to keep our business small. It is entirely possible to be a global business in the Rogue Valley.”



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Cultural Cluster Theatre, Music, Art



Photo by David Gibb | www.dgibbphoto.com

ASHLAND, OR - Ask Cynthia Rider why any business would want to locate in Southern Oregon and you will get an impassioned monologue: "People move here because they love this place. It's not any one thing. The quality of life here is so special. It's everything from the obvious natural beauty to the variety of resources. We have the university, one of the nation's leading theaters, a great high school, wonderful restaurants and shops—and you can get to any of these things in 15 minutes.

"We have a 'cultural cluster' of theater, music and art. We enjoy the amenities of a big city like New York or Boston or San Francisco without the wear and tear of daily life in a big city. You can get to a hike on Grizzly Peak in 30 minutes. You can get to Crater Lake in an hour and a half. You just can't do that from many places."

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) is a major economic driver with a \$34-million budget and 600 employees. More than 400,000 tickets are sold to its 11 productions throughout each 9-month season.

by Chris Cook

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Cultural Cluster - Theatre, Music, Art

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Tourism is big business in Southern Oregon. Eighty-five percent of the festival's visitors drive more than 2 ½ hours to get there. This helps make it possible for those other theater companies, music venues and festivals, shops, restaurants, B&Bs, wineries, jet boat rides and whitewater rafting trips to flourish here.

"Ashland is a thriving city thanks to all members of the community—including OSF," Cynthia explains. "The people we are attracting are intellectually curious—as are Ashland residents—and we all benefit from that creative energy. In addition, the company and staff are active members of the community and we bring that energy to the community just like the academics and scholars from Southern Oregon University (SOU)."

The festival has a long partnership with SOU. SOU is home to the Center for Shakespeare Studies and offers one of the country's best theater majors—both undergraduate and at the master's level. Student actor apprentices work at the festival each summer, OSF company members guest direct SOU productions and teach classes, and OSF relies on the university to provide well-trained graduates in many disciplines including information technology and marketing.

Another local partnership includes the Ashland Coalition, an informal monthly gathering where Cynthia joins leaders from the Ashland Chamber of Commerce, Asante Ashland Community Hospital, the city administrator, president of SOU and the school superintendent. They support each other and coordinate goings on in a friendly cooperative spirit.

As OSF continues to grow, it relies on partnerships with local firms—for banking, legal and landscape services, along with selling local wines, coffees and confections. Local contractor Adroit Construction recently built the new \$7.4-million production facility and will be building the new rehearsal hall. Medford-based ORW Architects designed both.

As the center point of the cultural cluster in Southern Oregon, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is a standout. And it's another good reason to move a business to Southern Oregon.



Photo by David Gibb | www.dgibbphoto.com

Costumes from OSF make their mark around the nation, "Saturday Night Live" recently rented two costumes for a skit on King Richard III.

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A River of Fun



Photo by Jim Craven | www.jimcravenphoto.com

MERLIN, OR - Rogue Wilderness Adventures offers outdoor enthusiasts a wide choice of energizing excursions - from half-day rafting trips to a four-day raft-supported hike along the Rogue River with hearty meals and overnights at comfortable riverfront lodges.

"Tourism is exploding in Southern Oregon," says Brad Niva, who purchased Rogue Wilderness Adventures 10 years ago. "There is a great thirst for adventure vacations—to many people outside the region, we are still like the Wild West."

The Wild West as far as recreational adventure and excitement—but the business community was friendly, resourceful, and interested in helping local companies succeed.

Despite Rogue Wilderness's rapid growth early on, Brad says he felt like the captain of a ship without a map or direction. It wasn't until he met Ron Fox, the director of Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development Inc. (SORED), that he found his business's edge—access to the local resources to assist in making the business financially viable.

by Chris Cook

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Brad also found personal balance in Southern Oregon. A former executive in medical sales, Brad traded his business suit and constant travel for the casual lifestyle of the Rogue Valley.

To help Brad's business, SOREDI called upon its TAG Team (Technical Advisory Group), a collection of volunteer professionals in all areas of business. The TAG Team members range from serial entrepreneurs to retired and working professionals in niche fields. It was here that Brad found a mentor and CFO consultant. Still in frequent contact with his mentor, he's now working with the financial consultant for "good, clear advice." According to Brad, "We were going out of business. We had a good amount of business but we were running it poorly. All of these professionals came together to help make us a better company. Now we're growing smart."

Once a small rafting company, Rogue Wilderness Adventures expanded to include hiking, fishing, wine tasting and sightseeing tours. You can hike along the Rogue River for four days supported by a raft with food and supplies, spending evenings at riverfront lodges. There's a tour where there's a winemaker along, offering different wines each evening. On other tours, it's beer and boots. Here, all camping gear and equipment is shuttled down river in a raft and is all set up for guests when they arrive after their day of hiking. Meals are designed to complement beer tasting, with the featured brewer explaining their craft and sharing interesting facts about their beers.

Well known for salmon and steelhead, the Rogue River's specialty is single and multi-day fishing trips with guides that have expertise in fly fishing, spin casting, bait bouncing and pulling plugs. All fishing rods and tackle are furnished by the guides, who double as chefs experienced in the art of riverbank cooking. There are special trips for couples only, as well as corporate fishing trips and team building retreats.

Brad's edge—taking advantage of local business resources—has helped expand and grow his business threefold and solidify his success. He provides local jobs, brings revenue to the local economy and gives visitors a true flavor of Southern Oregon's friendly, welcoming environment.



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