

Engineer by Day, Musician by Night

After more than 20 years, picking up his horn again brought some welcome balance back into the life of Curtis “T-Bone” Mayes.

IF YOU HAVE TAKEN IN any live big band music in the Northern Colorado area in recent years, you may have been listening to the velvet tones of Curtis Mayes, P.E. The director of pre-construction and engineering for Loveland, Colo.-based AISC member LPR Construction Company, Mayes also plays lead trombone with the Colorado Swing Big Band.

Operating out of Fort Collins, Colo., the Colorado Swing Big Band specializes in the music of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Frank Sinatra, Cole Porter and many others. Formed in 2004 by electrical engineer Kip Scholl, the classic 18-piece big band includes a director, five saxophones, four trombones and four trumpets, piano, bass, drums and vocalist. For smaller venues, they perform as a 10-piece ensemble. At the peak of its activity, in 2007, the group played about 30 “gigs” in northern Colorado.

“That was a really busy year,” Mayes said. “It was great to be playing again, but the combination of that many gigs in addition to practice time, work and family was a real challenge.”

Mayes took up the trombone as a junior-high student in Lubbock, Texas. Why the trombone? “Apparently I had a long enough arm when I was in seventh grade,” Mayes said, and the decision turned out to be a good one. He played in the high school band and continued his musical involvement when he entered Texas Tech University.

At the university, Mayes started out playing in the marching band, concert band, and the jazz ensemble, which he says was “way too much extracurricular activity for a serious civil engineering major.” Gradually he dropped the marching and concert bands, but stuck with the jazz ensemble for his entire four years at Texas Tech.

As a newly graduated civil engineer, Mayes moved to Dallas/Fort Worth and signed on with Derr Construction Co., where he started his own family and spent the next two decades in the steel erection business. In 2001, Mayes joined LPR Construction and relocated his family to Colorado.

With Mayes’ arrival, the company began to assert its expertise in considerably more challenging steel erection projects. LPR Construction had originally been started

► At the new Marlins Ballpark in Miami, LPR is using a system Mayes developed to “launch” multiple roof trusses erected on the same falsework towers. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/e380UP>.



in the late 1970s by three friends from Indiana—Larry, Pete and Rocky—who moved to Colorado with the dream of building houses.

As sometimes happens, the timing wasn’t quite right for that product. But the company founders adapted, applying their construction and management expertise to commercial construction work, ultimately growing the firm into its present form.

Meanwhile, as the Mayes’ two boys, Ryan and Matthew, neared graduation, he and his wife, Ann, looked forward to the coming change of pace. Ann returned to school to pursue a masters degree in counseling and Curtis dusted off his long-dormant King 3B trombone.

These days Mayes rehearses with the band twice a month at the Elks Club in Fort Collins, routinely making a beeline straight from work to rehearsals in a self-imposed dash. “But after rehearsal, I come back home with a smile on my face and a mellowness ... it’s as if I don’t have a care in the world.” The group already has a handful of gigs on its 2011 calendar, and for Mayes, those are good things to look forward to.

“You know what happens to your stress level when you go on vacation?” he asks rhetorically. “Being in the band is a lot like that. When I look back at my life, playing the trombone has always been like going on vacation for me. No matter if I was a student in high school or college, or today as a professional engineer, if stress is in my life and I meet up with a group of musicians, the stress just melts away as I start to play.”

“I think I’m going to live a lot longer because I injected music back into my life. When I look back at those 20 years I wasn’t playing, I was just a bit out of balance. The missing piece was the music. Jazz is really good medicine for me.” **MSC**

You can read more about the Colorado Swing Big Band and hear sample tracks from their 2010 CD “Colorado Swing” at www.coloradoswing.com.

◀ Curtis Mayes plays with the Colorado Swing Big Band. He also serves on the RCSC Bolt Council and the AISC Quality Control Chapter Task Committee.

