

people to know

SMOOTH RIDE

Biking and business development keep a Colorado fabricator rolling along.

SCOTT VAN DEREN spends a lot of time on his bicycle.

As of September, he estimated that he'd already put 3,500 miles in on his bike in 2012 (the equivalent of riding from Seattle to Miami with a couple hundred miles to spare).

And when his "typical" ride isn't enough, he undertakes grueling treks across the thin-air byways of his native Colorado. He's finished the Double Triple Bypass ride three times. This is a bike event that involves riding 120 miles over three mountain passes and gaining 10,000 ft of vertical—then doing the whole thing in the opposite direction the following day.

Growing up in the Denver area, Van Deren was an avid skier and hiker. He earned a degree in business from the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU) when he wasn't playing basketball, tennis or golf or otherwise keeping active the Colorado outdoors.

Unfortunately, numerous ankle surgeries forced him to give up skiing and hiking. So he switched to biking, both road and mountain, as it put less stress on his ankle. And now you'll find him on his road bike (currently a carbon-fiber Specialized Roubaix) or hitting the trails on his full-suspension Specialized Stumpjumper mountain bike several times a week.

As you might have guessed, he commutes to work on his bike when he can, making the 21-mile trip to his office at Drake-Williams Steel, Inc., an AISC member fabricator in Aurora, Colo., in a little more than an hour. His enthusiasm for riding is contagious, and he is involved in several group rides, including a Tuesday-night mountain bike ride with industry professionals.

"A lot of people golf; we ride," laughs Van Deren. "It has been very rewarding to get to know customers, architects and engineers through the shared camaraderie of cycling."

While Van Deren has been in the fabrication world for 24 years, his early professional life had nothing to do with construction. After graduating from CU, he spent five years in the corporate world. It wasn't until 1988, when he bought his father-in-law's fabrication shop near downtown Denver, that he got into the steel industry.

Van Deren enjoys the tangibility of working in the construction world. "There's something satisfying about seeing completed projects and how they effect people's lives," he says. "I like the idea of building something that adds value to the community."

And in some cases, this includes Van Deren himself, as his shop has fabricated the steel for two churches he's attended (his sister was married in one of them) as well as a recreation center where his wife swims regularly.

By 2007, Mountain Steel had outgrown its facility, which was on a relatively tight site that didn't offer room for expansion. Omaha-based Drake-Williams was expanding its Colorado operations and had recently opened a large facility in Aurora. Van Deren had done business with Drake-Williams in the past and saw an opportunity.

"The two companies were remarkably similar, with a positive company culture," he says. In addition to structural projects, both companies were active in "contract manufacturing," producing bridge expansion joints, railroad components, traffic signal poles and other non-traditional fabrication jobs.

And so in 2011, Drake-Williams Steel purchased Mountain Steel in a mutually beneficial merger. One-hundred percent of Mountain Steel's employees came to work at Drake-Williams' Aurora facility. With the change, Van Deren has stepped away from his former management role and now focuses on bringing in business and building relationships across the industry. Beginning with the University of Colorado Hospital Tower expansion, a 3,500-ton project that was completed last year, Drake-Williams has experienced tremendous growth. One of the company's current projects is the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Aurora, Colo., which will open in late 2015 and uses 7,800 tons of fabricated structural steel.

Van Deren cultivates new opportunities not only for his company but also with his cycling. In 2005, he and a friend created their own ride, called the CRAMP (Colorado Road Ascent of Mountain Passes) Tour, whose 350-mile route includes every paved mountain pass over 10,000 ft in Colorado (according to his calculations, there are 26).

"We did them all in four-and-a-half days," Van Deren recalls. "Our own support team was an RV and two drivers."

Although the ride took place in June, they experienced a fair amount of rain and even snow. But just like working in the construction industry, some of the best rewards or projects come from being challenged and successfully overcoming unexpected obstacles.

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- Van Deren, near the summit of Loveland Pass in Colorado during the 2012 Double Triple Bypass ride—in sunny and inclement weather.

