

PLANET **JH** Weekly
JACKSON HOLE'S FREE INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER



% For
the
Tetons

An idea to sustain life in JH
takes root in its third year.

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For the Tetons

An idea to sustain life in JH takes root in its third year.

By Brigid Mander

Reduce. Reuse. Recycle. *The phrase has become commonplace around the United States, inspiring widely varied action among individuals and businesses. In Jackson Hole, many locals make the message a lifestyle, but on a larger scale, environmentalism can be difficult for businesses, the research alone being somewhat of a burden.*

1% for the Tetons has been striving to remedy this for the last three years, and tomorrow, marks the third successful year for the nonprofit, an accomplishment that could signal the organization's rise from experiment to mainstay.

At a reception tomorrow evening, the local nonprofit will announce its third round of grants to other area groups dedicated to sustainability in Jackson Hole. Moreover, 1% has seen its membership double since its founding, and its grant amounts have steadily increased. And with new giving programs, it might have an operations budget for the first time since its inception.

1% for the Tetons, a local spinoff of 1% for the Planet, pools 1 percent of gross revenue from more than 80 member businesses, and each year takes the proceeds and grants funding to projects that apply for funds. The fund advocates crossing barriers and collaborations between for-profits and nonprofits, government agencies, and any other entities that want to give back and help preserve this region's beauty, as one of the most important values in winning grant money.

Strongly supported by local member businesses, 1% for the Tetons has shown in a relatively short time what is important to the people of this area, and what they would like to preserve, is quickly identified by the grants that are submitted and ultimately funded. Since environmentalism is sometimes a difficult thing to work into a company's balance sheet, 1% for the Tetons has shown that with a little 'venture philanthropy,' the innovation and energy the local community is willing to put into sustaining this area is very impressive.

What's that sticker in your window?

Despite the growing proliferation of its logo, what 1% for the Tetons (1%T) does, beyond a vague identity as an environmental benefactor, and how, has remained unclear to many people. This was intentional, explained founder Jonathan Schechter.

"We didn't want to promise a lot in the beginning and not be able to deliver," he said.

But now, after three years and two grant cycles, Schechter said that 1% has demonstrated 'proof of concept' – that is, the idea works, and moreover, has been extremely successful in showing that local businesses can work collaboratively on issues they see as important, and perhaps most importantly, fund ways to maintain the quality of life in the Tetons.

The path of the first and only local chapter of the global 1% for the Planet began when Schechter founded the Charture Institute, in 2001. Charture's mission was to identify problems the Teton region faces as more people choose to live here. This research resulted in the Charture Institute's formation of Sustaining Jackson Hole, which, it was hoped, could turn the knowledge gained from the the Institute's research into action.

In 2005, Sustaining Jackson Hole held a conference hosting keynote speaker Yvon Chouinard, founder of the outdoor retail line Patagonia, as well as 1% for the Planet (1%P).

At the time, 1%P was small, with only about 150 members worldwide, but Chouinard's presentation prompted JH resident Sean Love to ask Schechter if the 1% concept could be localized. Intrigued, Schechter contacted Chouinard about starting a local chapter.

Chouinard said, "Sure," and Schechter remembered, "Neither of us really knew what that meant."

Nonetheless, the idea was met with a pretty easy reception, Schechter said.

"When I told people, 'I'm starting this thing called 1% for the Tetons,' business owners said, 'Hey, that's great! I'm in. What is it?'"

The initial launch in 2005 netted a 30-business membership, which has since tripled. Schechter expects close to 100 businesses in the near future.

He credits this support to the factors that draw people to Jackson Hole and the business owners who were previously uncertain where to put their money in the valley of many nonprofits.

People live in Jackson Hole, Schechter said, because they want to, not because they have to. If an individual grows enough roots to start a business, she wants to give back in a way that preserves the things she loves.

Business owners, he found, were frustrated, because they wanted to give back, but were unable to do the research to decide where to put their money.

The 1% model

1% for the Tetons differs significantly from its parent, 1% for the Planet, in the way that it chooses to collect and distribute donated monies. Because of the breadth of the organization, spanning the globe and dozens of countries, 1%P-member businesses do their own research, choose an approved environmental organization to fund, and send proof of donation to 1%P. But when a business joins 1%T, the money is pooled, and a



DEREK DILUZZI

Jonathan Schechter wants to make life sustainable in the Tetons.

rotating committee of member business owners review the grants.

Local business owner and 1%T member Toby Byrum said that this is what Teton area business owners prefer:

“Everyone here is so busy, they don’t have time to figure out where to donate money,” said Byrum, owner of Nuts and Bolts Inc. “All the businesses are happy to let the grants committee choose where the money goes.”

The decision to depart from the 1%P model came from Charture’s research, which showed that growth and change, as well as their impacts, cut across disciplines, geographic boundaries and political jurisdictions. To make 1% for the Tetons most effective, the creators decided to cross all these boundaries as well, with different groups coming together to sustain the quality of life in this area.

Essentially, their idea was to pit 1%T against redundancy and competition between groups and nonprofits, which seem to work counter-constructively to their shared goal of sustaining life in the Tetons.

So, 1%T decided from the start to place a very heavy emphasis on collaboration and cross-jurisdictional efforts. They wanted to see nonprofits, government agencies, even individuals, as well as for-profit businesses come together to work for the common good.

“We are thinking outside the box,” said Clare Symmons, who worked with Schechter to develop the grants process and currently oversees the grants committee. “We want to see collaboration, and not just between nonprofits, but between anyone. It’s a really exciting concept, and pretty new; it’s developing as we go along.”

In this way, the funds can be distributed as the businesses see fit, which promotes a healthy balance of cooperation and diversity, rather than the mission of a particular nonprofit.

Equally important in the eyes of 1%T is how the grants are made.

Schechter and Symmons came up with the idea for a rotating council of nine member businesses to decide where the money goes each year. Seats go out on a staggered scale, so that three seats change each year.

Committee members’ names are kept secret during their tenure to avoid any type of lobbying activity.

Basically, the businesses trust the members of the committee to make good grants, using local knowledge and local priorities.

“It’s like venture capital philanthropy,” said Byrum, of his time on the committee. “The grants committee does the research for all the other business owners, and it’s making a ton of impact. We’ve owned projects that wouldn’t have gotten off the ground without 1%T, projects that have made a huge difference here.”

Pilot projects

The first two grant years have funded just under \$250,000 to local initiatives. Usually, the money is meant as a one-time boost, a way for organizations to experiment with new ideas. If successful, they can take the project to the next level.

One of the most interesting grant requests was the Food Waste Pilot Program, proposed by Terra Firma, a for-profit business, in collaboration with five area restaurants and one grocery store. The funds the consortium won from 1%T were matched by the Teton Conservation District, a government agency funded by the mill levy.

Terra Firma wanted to know whether collecting all the organic food waste from local food services could be made into a profitable venture, benefitting the public and the environment.

Essentially, certain waste would be diverted from regular trash, thereby reducing the amount of compost shipped to the valley from Colorado and Montana. Teton County’s organic waste would become a commodity.

Food waste had never been tracked before, said Penny McBride, a consultant to Terra Firma. There was no data on the subject, and exploring the potential of the idea was too great a financial burden for a private business. So, Terra Firma partnered with six food service providers and the TCD, and received a grant in 1%T’s inaugural year.

The pilot project showed that they could collect almost twice the estimated amount of waste, that large-scale collection would be necessary to make the endeavor profitable, and that there was a huge amount of interest in the program from other area restaurants. The project was so successful that 1%T

made an exception when they applied for another grant in the second year, and awarded them \$40,000 to see what could happen on the next level.

The large-scale project was derailed, however, because of lack of space at the Teton County transfer station, but most people involved view this as a temporary glitch.

“It was a great feasibility study, because it allowed the County [trash services] to see what was possible,” McBride said. “It’s one of the greatest things we can do for the community, but also one of the most challenging. It’s going to take continued effort on everybody’s part, but we see this moving forward.”

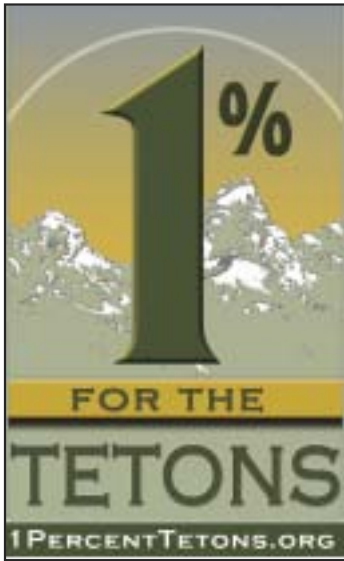
She added that it would have been impossible to gather the initial information without 1%T.

Other grants have funded more finite projects, such as the \$7,700 that was granted to the ‘Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers’ request by the Snake River Fund. The grant funded a one-time equipment purchase to be placed at popular put-ins to help remove invasive aquatic species from watercrafts before they are launched in the river.

Transparency against redundancy

1%T is also striving for innovation in its emphasis on transparency. Findings from successful grant proposals are published online, so others looking for data on anything a 1%T grant has researched can easily access the results.

“I know of no other entity that publishes their grants results online,”



Symmons said.

In this way, hopefully redundant studies in other areas can be avoided, and people can build on the results 1%T has funded.

This year, a total of 23 grant requests, totaling \$394,000, were submitted to 1%T. The amount the committee will be awarding will be made public at the ceremony tomorrow, but it is upwards of \$100,000, according to Schechter.

As people begin to understand more about what 1%T is trying to do, the quality of the requests has greatly increased, making the line between who will receive a grant and who will not much thinner.

"While 1%T had to say no to many worthy projects, I am thrilled with the awards the grants committee made," Schechter said of this week's awards. "I think our members and the community will be too."

Setting an example

1%P has been following the progress of 1%T with great interest. The CEO of 1%P, Terry Kellogg will be in town for both the members meeting and awards ceremony.

Both 1%P and 1%T hope to inspire other chapters but, in reality, operating costs are a great challenge.

Three years of full-time work on Schechter's part has brought 1%T to this point, but Schechter said that he hasn't had money to hire staff, or even pay himself.

To change that, they implemented the Friends program, for entities or individuals that want to help but can't commit to 1% of business revenue.

Donations from Friends will be put toward operating costs, because 100 percent of businesses' 1% goes into the grants pool. The success of the Friends program can hopefully pave the way for other communities to start 1% chapters as well.

Even though people enthusiastically supported the idea in the beginning, one early donor said of 1%T, "I was so surprised it worked!"

Even Symmons, when first approached to help, was a little hesitant.

"I thought it was a very ambitious project, she said cautiously, "but the enthusiasm from the community for it is amazing."

And in the tough economy and business climate today, it is notable that there hasn't been attrition from the ranks of the members.

Byrum said he thinks the reason is that people are proud of what they've accomplished so far.

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