

1% for the Tetons: Like a green mutual fund

When it comes to the future health of our environment, Yvon Chouinard says he is “still a pessimist.”

“We know government isn’t going to do it,” said the climbing pioneer and founder of Patagonia Inc. from Ventura, Calif., on Friday. “We know multinational companies won’t do it. Who else is going to do it besides us?”

Born of his frustration with corporations that benefit from the environment while giving little to nothing in return was 1% for the Planet, founded in 2001 by he and Craig Mathews, owner of Blue Ribbon Flies. 1P is a group of more than 300 businesses donating 1 percent of sales to environmental groups dedicated to sustaining the natural environment.

Five years later Chouinard and Mathews have given their blessings to 1% for the Tetons, a complementary though fundamentally different nonprofit dedicated to the same cause. Co-founder Jonathan Schechter, executive director of the nonprofit Charture Institute, which will oversee the project until it can stand on its own, spearheads the local spin-off.

Since its inception last winter and official kickoff earlier this month, 32 Teton County businesses, large and small, have signed up for the program, joining eight valley businesses that had already joined 1P. With member businesses projecting approximate gross revenues of \$20 million, the initial granting pool is estimated to be at least \$200,000. “To put that \$200,000 in context, the Community Foundation of Jackson Hole annually makes around \$250,000 in general grants,” said Schechter. And because all 1T businesses automatically become members of 1P, “In one fell swoop we increased the worldwide membership of 1% for the Planet by 10 percent.”

Base Camp Communications owner Mike Geraci is an enthusiastic founding member. He sees 1T as both an exciting new tool in the ongoing fight to sustain the qualities that make Jackson Hole so desirable and an opportunity to make good on his responsibility to give back to the place that gives him, his family and his employees so much.

“It’s a quality of life tax,” Geraci summarizes neatly. “This is an answer, if not the answer, to how we address increased pressure on lands and decreased funding to manage those lands. ... If the river goes to crap and the parks go to hell it doesn’t mean that much that you [have a

chance to enjoy them].”

Melanie Harrice, co-owner of Jackson Whole Grocer (formerly Foodtown) and Harvest with husband Bob Arndt, also jumped on board with both feet.

“There are tons of projects that fall through the cracks and this money could help some of them come to fruition,” she said.

Harrice also has seen an immediate return on her investment in the program in positive response from customers, who often ask about 1T after seeing one of the store’s ubiquitous stickers advertising membership.

The two programs differ in one major way. Members of 1P have the opportunity to direct their donated money to one or more individual organizations. For example, Planet Jackson Hole, a 1P member, chooses to split its 1 percent between Jackson Hole Land Trust and Trout Unlimited’s local chapter. Members of 1T will write a single check to be deposited in a granting pool that will be used to fund as-yet unidentified projects. Why would a business be interested in giving up control of how its donations are spent? Chouinard wouldn’t.

“If I was a Jackson businessman I would want to join 1P and forget about 1T because I decide where the money goes,” he said.

However, Chouinard quickly warns, that is only because he is willing to do the hard work involved with philanthropy. Just as serious investors in the stock market should extensively research companies they are interested in buying, Chouinard and his advisors become tremendously knowledgeable about the companies that benefit from Patagonia’s largesse.

But like most people invested in the stock market, not every business owner has that kind of time. For them 1T is “kind of like a mutual fund,” says Chouinard. “And we already do something like that with 1P. We have some sizable companies that just want to write one check and have us do the homework.”

Schechter believes 1P and 1T are complementary in design and focus. “They are both about directing money to sustain our natural resources. 1P has a global focus, while 1T has a local focus.” However, he says the perception that 1T is more locally focused has struck a chord with local businesses. “I have found there has been a real visceral appeal to 1T with money in the Tetons coming back to the Tetons, a real strong emotional appeal.”