

|| WHO WE ARE ||

Chris Renner: a 'chronic entrepreneur'

By Aaron Burnett

ABURNETT@SUMMIDDAILY.COM

The transition from developing a nationwide online dairy product exchange to custom home building in the Colorado High Country may not seem natural for most people, but for Chris Renner it's just another brick along the path of life.

For Renner, an entrepreneurial spirit has led to an eclectic career path and the opportunity to give back to the community that he calls home.

Breckenridge part I

Renner first moved to Summit County in 1993, shortly after graduating from Baylor University with a degree in accounting and finance. The 22-year-old was working at an accounting firm in Dallas when he decided to try something different.

"I told my parents I could be poor and happy in Summit County, versus being poor and unhappy in Dallas," Renner said.

After arriving in Breckenridge, the recent college graduate, who describes himself as a "chronic entrepreneur," took up small business consulting, emphasizing the growing role that computers and technology were playing in the business world.

The interest in technology and its relationship with business was a theme that would continue to play out throughout Renner's career.

It was also during this time that Renner met his future wife, Shannon, a computer programmer from Alabama and the woman he describes as "the love of my life."

In September 1995, Chris and Shannon married at Keystone Ranch. The young couple remained in Summit County until 1998, when they packed up for Denver and a new challenge.

"We got cold and I wanted to conquer the world," said Renner of the move to the Front Range.

The dairy dot com

Renner's entrepreneurial spirit struck again as he formed an Internet startup after moving to Denver. In an effort to raise venture capital for the project, the Renners moved again, this time to Dallas, the city where Chris was raised.

The shift to the Lone Star State allowed Renner to raise several million dollars to get what would eventually become dairy.com off the ground. The fledgling company provided jobs for roughly 50 people, as it brought the top dairy producers nationwide together to form what was essentially a national dairy exchange.

While Renner was involved, the company exchanged more than half a billion dollars in dairy products.

A return to Summit

While successful in Dallas, Renner said he and his wife had their hearts set on a different lifestyle. In



The Renner family, from left: Jack, Shannon, Chase and Chris.

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November 2002, they returned to Breckenridge where the family remains today.

"We came back for the quality of life, the small town and a community that is active and cares," said Renner. "We wanted to raise our kids in a community like Summit County."

Back in the High Country, Renner turned to technology once again to create a unique business model. In 2005 Renner started Pinnacle Mountain Homes, a custom home-building business that integrates many of the latest technological advancements into the design and construction processes.

"Our approach has been 'How do we streamline construction,'" Renner said.

The homebuilder contributes Pinnacle's success to its unique incorporation of technology into the building process. Construction on a typical custom home in Summit County takes a year, versus a nine- to 10-month average for a Pinnacle home, said Renner.

Some of the unique approaches that have been taken at Pinnacle include the use of iPhones and iPads by foremen at construction sites so clients can stay in touch and informed, weekly detailed email updates to each customer concerning the progress of their home, regularly updated site photos accessible online, and a virtual design process that allows clients to provide feedback from any-

where in the world.

"We're building homes for 90 percent of our customers that are out of state or out of the country," Renner said. "... We can do all our designs virtually."

The integration of new technologies has enabled Pinnacle to flourish despite the down economy, said Renner. The business constructed 10 homes both last year and this year. The next busiest custom homebuilder in Summit constructed two homes each year.

Renner said he has developed a passion for custom home building since founding Pinnacle.

"I love the creativity. ... I get to deliver people's dream homes. I get to be there through that process. It's extremely rewarding," Renner said.

The custom-home builder said one of the biggest keys to his success has been open and clear communication with clients.

"Sometimes I tell our clients that we're not really in the construction business, we're in the communication business," Renner said.

Giving something back

Renner's business success has enabled him to take an active roll in the betterment of the community. While he had volunteered and served with multiple nonprofits throughout the years, it was in 2009 that the father of two young boys made one of his biggest contributions to Summit County.

After attending a public meeting

concerning proposed cuts to the Summit School District's budget, Renner formed the Summit Education Foundation to help funnel private funds into the local school district. During its first year, the foundation raised more than \$100,000 for the district.

"We've tried to be some of the biggest cheerleaders of education and of our school district," Renner said.

In addition to his founding of the education foundation, Renner also recently helped start The Peak School that is scheduled to begin classes in the fall of 2012 in the old CMC building in Breck. The education advocate said some have raised the question of whether the education foundation and the private school are conflicting ideas. Renner counters that the two ideas are not opposed, but rather provide additional options to Summit residents.

"We desire to advocate for all the students in the district and also provide something different for those that are looking for that," Renner said.

What's on tap

Looking toward the future, Renner said he intends to stay in the custom-home building business. His sons, Chase, 11, and Jack, 8, both attend Breckenridge Elementary. Next fall, Chase will be in the first class to attend The Peak School.