

Chaffee's Got Heart Community Spotlight: Absolute Bikes

The Chaffee's Got Heart Committee is extremely proud of local businesses and individuals that have gone above and beyond by doing extraordinary things during these uncertain times.

From innovating ways to thrive despite trying circumstances to showering struggling members of our community with generosity to prioritizing the health and safety of our most vulnerable, these businesses and individuals, who have been nominated for this honor by fellow community members, have shown what it really means when we say: Chaffee's Got HEART.

Today, we sat down with Shawn Gillis, owner of Absolute Bikes to find out how the pandemic changed operations at this business while maintaining the drive to give the people of Chaffee County the knowledge of local trail systems, resources to enjoy the trails, and promoting a safe and sanitary community environment for locals and tourists alike.

How did COVID cause you to innovate the way you do business?

It was a big learning process because as we understood more about COVID-19 transmission, the more change would need to occur in order to operate safely and respectfully. Between the beginning of the pandemic until now there has been a lot of new information. Therefore, we have had to constantly change as well. For instance, in order to still be able to interact with customers we put more time into phone conversations. People could prepay remotely, mail-check, and we can set items outside the shop for pickup. We have even delivered items to people's homes.

The toughest change for us was how we would talk to people. Some people were sensitive and others didn't take COVID-19 seriously. We had to ask ourselves, "How do we come up with ways to talk to a diverse group of customers while maintaining solution driven mindset?"

What if someone comes in without a mask? We were able to hand out free masks given to us by the County. This was very helpful. There has been constant cleaning in the store. We had to do a lot more work on our side in taking cleanliness more seriously.

Also, we had to help customers change the way that they would typically interact in our store. One of our employees started the saying: Hands in pockets looking. As people are walking through the shop, they want to ring all the bells and touch the bikes. We try to encourage the "hands in pockets looking" in order to be more respectful to everyone.



Why did you decide to go above & beyond to contribute to our community?

Several of our programs had to be postponed or we transitioned them into smaller groups. We just did our helmet program. Over the last 13 years it was in fall but it had to take place during the following spring because it would not have been appropriate last fall.

Salida has been lucky that it already had a great local trail system. It is exciting to notice that the amount of trail users has gone up in the last year and we wanted to support that. We are VERY lucky here in this community.

Where do you see examples of the idea that 'Chaffee's Got Heart'?

I noticed a little over 20 years ago when we moved here- as you walked down the street people would make eye contact and say hello. That goes a long way when you have heart. Even though today we are wearing masks, the eye contact has not changed. This shows a level of respect for others. It is probably something that I have noticed in this town way more than in any other place I lived or visited. The eye contact and saying hey- it's a sincere friendly. With the masks, it's even more important now because it's been a very isolating year. People here really do care and I really think Salida has a lot of heart.

Being in the bike industry, I have noticed that more families are getting out and doing things together. I have never seen so many families get out have fun together, and biking is a great way to share this time. When other things, like vacations and travel, are eliminated it is nice to see families getting out and being active together.

What's your biggest takeaway from the past year?

The biggest take away is the fact that we all have been constantly learning through this process. Everything was different and unknown in the beginning of the pandemic. Things that took place last March through the summer were much different as compared to now. The more that was learned about this virus allowed us to get into new cleaning, talking, and helping routines. It has been a year of learning and constant change, which has resulted in people coming away with much better habits. Public interactions are taken more seriously and I find that people are much more respectful of that. The public in general seems to be much healthier and hopefully that will continue with the better hygiene habits. This change in public perception has also allowed us to be better. Finding solutions has been collaborative- we have talked to other businesses about how they have approached having to change and we would come together at the end and say "hey, that's a cool idea".

We are very lucky to be in this community where there is so much open space. Talking to friends and family in the city about going on a bike ride- they only have a few places to go which might be okay to get on a couple times out of the day. Whereas, we can just walk out the door and do something active because we are surrounded by public land and in town trails. This is something we don't necessarily think about, but probably 99% of people don't have this opportunity. This gives me a greater appreciation for the environment.

Cool Tidbits: interesting facts/ways people can get involved/anything that can't fit in the article that you want to include.

Absolute Bikes gives back to the Community with our youth programs and participation with Salida Racing, our local High School MTB Team, and most recently with our 4th Grade Helmet program.

We volunteer and support both Salida Mountain Trails and Salida Parks and Open Space and Trails because these organizations have done so much for our riding, running, and dog walking communities! More people have been able to enjoy dirt and paved trails through the pandemic. These are two of my favorite nonprofits!

For all the dirt and singletrack trails, check out Salida Mountain Trails at:

<https://salidamountaintrails.org>

For all Salida in town trails, check out Salida Parks Open Space and Trails at:

<https://salidaparksopenspacetrails.org>

I had to ask Shawn, "What is your favorite local trail?" He responded, "One of my favorites is still Frontside because I spent a lot of time building it."

Thanks Shawn and Absolute Bikes for everything you have done for Chaffee County!