



Photo by Jim Craven | www.jimcravenphoto.com

GRANTS PASS, OR- Sparkling steel, aluminum and exotic copper screws and fasteners are displayed in precise rows around the reception room at Oregon Swiss Precision. As a busy manufacturer for the West Coast aerospace industry, their company greeter Sensei, a silly and gorgeous golden-lab-collie mutt, arrives out front quickly, wagging her tail to make sure everyone knows they are welcome. Her owner, Mike Andersen, is not far behind her. From his piercing gaze and rugged face it's obvious he is a man comfortable in the wild country of Southern Oregon, and his solid handshake suggests he's a reliable man in the shop. He and his brother started this company in 1989, and their story is a tale of career twists and turns across the modern west.

As rural ranch kids in Utah, Mike and three brothers, Daryl, Tracy and David, were raised on hard work. Mike started reading Forbes Magazine when he was just 16. His first job out of high school was welding at St. George Steel, making missile casings, railroad cars and a variety of large steelwork. He loved it and learned to weld well, but that business closed. In the early 1980s, Mike followed his oldest brother Daryl to the booming Silicon Valley in California. Then came Tracy. Finally, David followed the path to California a couple of years later.

by Heather McNeill

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To raise a family here  
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## Seriously Independent

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Welding satellite dishes in the San Jose area with Tracy, Mike was making good money and taking night classes in electronics. He was determined to get into the tech boom. When he graduated, he and Tracy switched to programming radio signals for satellite receivers. After a couple of weeks of brotherly competition, racing to program the most receivers in a shift, they found programming wasn't as interesting as they had hoped. They wanted the excitement of making new things. They were high-tech guys in the heart of the Silicon Valley boom, but it was quickly turning into a one dimensional world. Only people with high-tech salaries could afford to live in the valley.

Then came an opportunity to take over a Swiss machining business from an aging relative. Mike was sick of traffic, crime and California-sized taxes, so he started looking for the right place to start over and launch a business. Real estate fliers from Southern Oregon showed houses with gorgeous views on 15 acres that cost the same as jam-packed Silicon Valley cookie-cutter houses in "desirable" neighborhoods.

Mike and his younger brother David, a talented CNC programmer, moved to Grants Pass, started their business and began filling orders for grandpa's clients using Mike's traditional cam screw machine method of manufacturing. For six months they worked long hours, skipping salaries for themselves until they saved up to buy their first CNC machine. In a year, they were totally a CNC shop and able to fill orders in a fraction of the time it had taken to design the cams for the Swiss manufacturing method. They were suppliers of fasteners and parts for high-tech companies in Silicon Valley, but by the late 90s, electronics manufacturing was going to Asia. Mike and David saw the shift coming and made connections in the aerospace industry. As a result, their client base grew again.

At the turn of the millennia, the brothers' operation needed a larger facility. In 2004, they built a new manufacturing facility in Grants Pass and worked with Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development (SORED) to qualify for an economic incentive zone and get capital investment tax relief that dramatically helped offset the costs.

Doing business from Southern Oregon has its challenges and advantages. They admit the labor pool here is tough for them. "We're short on machinist here." They have had to train many of their employees from the ground up, or hire from outside the area. That factor is offset by others according to Mike. "You move to Southern Oregon because you love it here. To raise a family here is phenomenal—all the lakes, rivers, mountains, snowboarding...it's magic."



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Mike Andersen, President of Oregon Swiss Precision, with company greeter, Sensei

THE SOUTHERN OREGON  
EDGE

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