

Pedal power

Bend courier business delivers food, compost material all around town

By David Jasper • Photos by Andy Tullis / *The Bulletin*

Published: August 14, 2010 4:00AM PST

"I have close calls every day," said Daniel Brewster, a bicycle courier in Bend, as he pedaled down Franklin Avenue wearing a jersey advertising Cascade Couriers, a company he started. "The reality is that cars aren't really looking for bikes, and so it's up to us to make sure we don't get hit."

The Bulletin met Brewster behind Bend's only bike courier business Tuesday morning, shortly before he picked up a cargo of fresh European breads from Bread LaVoy for delivery to three eateries around Bend.

Brewster, 28, grew up on the Oregon Coast and moved around a bit after high school. Plans to study graphic design in college fell by the wayside when he landed a job doing graphic design, he said.

But three years ago, he gave up his job designing signs to start his pedal-powered courier business. "I bike commuted every day, through the winter, and I was kind of looking for something else to do (where) I could be my own boss," he explained.

He began looking into the possibility of a bike courier service. He knew of at least two earlier bike messenger services that focused on urgent, small-document delivery, he said, and neither lasted long. Such services are "tough to make work in a city like Bend."

"A regular messenger service wouldn't really work out because (there's) not enough paper moving around town," he said, sitting at a table near his cargo bike on Minnesota Avenue. "Downtown's



Daniel Brewster signals to turn while riding down Wall Street in downtown Bend.



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not quite big enough.”

Brewster found several websites for businesses hauling recycling, including Pedal People, in Massachusetts, and Bikes at Work Inc., an Iowa company that makes the trailers he uses. He looked into the different types of cargo he could move around and came upon compost.

For a flat monthly rate, “I would pick up food waste from residential customers, and I would take it to Field’s Farm on the east side of town,” he said. “Now we have probably 70 or more customers for composting, and I haven’t really done a lot of advertising.”

The farm’s location, on Pettigrew Road between Bear Creek and Reed Market roads, can make for a challenging ride on roads with narrow shoulders. Business 97 at the south end of Bend is probably the worst place to ride, he said.

“There are definitely places in Bend that are better than others, but if we’re not out there riding on those roads, it’s never going to get better,” he said.

In the early days of the business, he rode all over town to make pickups. Now he divides the city by quadrants for different weekly runs.

Wife Amy is his biggest supporter, he said.

“But, obviously, at first: ‘I’m going to quit my job and ride a bike for a living?’ That would make anybody a little nervous,” he said.

Which stands to reason. For the first two years, he couldn’t pay himself. “I was working two jobs, just trying to make it work,” he said. Now, he’s “making a living doing this, just barely.”

Brewster works six days a week and has two part-time employees, although “that’s more just because you can really only do this about 20 hours a week, being on the bike and pulling that much weight,” he said. “You’d burn yourself out. It’s not like a typical messenger job, where you’re wearing a backpack and riding around all day.”



Above, Daniel Brewster emerges from the tunnel beneath the Bend Parkway as he rides west along Franklin Avenue toward downtown Tuesday. “If you ride any of the secondary roads, they’re all torn up really bad,” he says. At right, Brewster delivers fresh bread to Lone Pine Coffee Roasters in downtown Bend.



Above, Daniel Brewster emerges from the tunnel beneath the Bend Parkway as he rides west along Franklin Avenue toward downtown Tuesday. “If you ride any of the secondary roads, they’re all torn up really bad,” he says. At right, Brewster delivers fresh bread to Lone Pine Coffee Roasters in downtown Bend.

He's recently begun pushing his other delivery capabilities. "Now we contract with Bread LaVoy and Sparrow Bakery, and we deliver their bread and pastries to their wholesale accounts downtown."

He uses the same front-loaded cargo bike to deliver weekly newspaper The Source around downtown, about a 400-pound haul. He uses trailers for larger stuff, such as composting.

In case you doubt the power of his legs: Last summer, when he and his wife moved from the south end of Bend to the Newport Avenue area, they moved it all by bike. With the help of a large group of friends and strangers, and with sponsorship from Deschutes Brewery and Pizza Mondo, the group moved all of the Brewsters' belongings in one 20-minute trip.

"We moved a washer and dryer, we moved a sofa, bed," he said.

But, more so than the weight of what he's hauling, it's the seasons that give him trouble.

"Winters can be tough, especially when the streets aren't plowed. When there is a bike lane, there's cinder in it. That's probably the toughest time of year." In fact, he has a pretty apt cyclist's thumbnail-sketch of the weather in Bend: Winter is snowy, spring is windy, summer is hot and fall is perfect.

Bend's city limits are also his company's limits. However, don't ask him to deliver a heavy load on Awbrey Butte.

"I tried doing that once. Pulling 200 pounds up Awbrey Butte's just not really feasible," he said. "Plus, in wintertime, going up Awbrey would just be too dangerous."

Anyone riding a bike six days a week is going to develop a few pet peeves, and Brewster has his. Principally, it's the rough condition of many of the side roads in Bend.

"If you ride any of the secondary roads, they're all torn up really bad. There's not really a good road in Bend," he said, chuckling.

Brewster said he wishes people — drivers and cyclists included — exhibited more patience.

"I get really frustrated when I see cyclists riding the wrong way ... because they're making me look bad. And in turn, motorists are upset at me, because they think I ride like that as well. So we do



Brewster delivers fresh food to Zydeco Kitchen & Cocktails downtown.



Brewster loads bread into his delivery bike Tuesday morning at Bread LaVoy. "We contract with Bread LaVoy and Sparrow Bakery, and we deliver their bread and pastries to their wholesale accounts downtown," he says. Below, he delivers the fresh bread to 900 Wall.



our best to be courteous to everybody.”

Soon, Brewster climbed on his bike for the 10 a.m. bread pickup — his favorite route — and I did my best to keep up. He pedaled up Minnesota Avenue to Lava Lane.

“I’m going to get in front of this bus,” he said, quickly making a left turn onto Franklin Avenue. Once I caught up, we went through the pedestrian tunnel, which he uses because it accommodates the width of his cargo bike. We next cut through the Les Schwab Tire Center parking lot onto Second Street, reaching Bread LaVoy a few minutes later.

The small building, a former doughnut shop, smelled of fresh bread when we walked in the open back door. Manager Ashley Poe was with a customer buying bread from the service window.

The most stressful part of the job, Brewster said, is having to be alert all the time while he rides. But the fresh bread he is occasionally offered is a nice perk.

“It’s easy to dwell on the negative things, but most people are pretty cool,” Brewster said. He carefully loaded baguettes and other breads and arranged them in the cargo bin at the front of the bike. We crossed Franklin Avenue and headed back downtown to Lone Pine Coffee Roasters, Zydeco Kitchen & Cocktails, and 900 Wall Restaurant and Bar as he made his deliveries.

Tuesday’s bread run is one of the shorter routes he rides, and once the cargo bin was empty, Brewster’s work was done, at least for the morning.

Does he love his job?

“Yeah I do. It’s awesome. It’s great,” Brewster said. “I don’t need to go to the gym, that’s for sure.”

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To contact Cascade Couriers, call 541-389-9369 or visit www.cascadecouriers.com.

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