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- [Montana big on small businesses](#)
- [Skin Chic is beacon of beauty](#)
- [Culligan growing labels](#)
- [Yellowstone Photo sees the big picture](#)
- [Le Petit Outre set to open new wholesale bakery](#)
- [Active clientele fills Alpine Physical Therapy](#)
- [Beaudette Consulting engineers building a reputation](#)
- [Dayspring Restoration handles surprises](#)
- [Big Dipper Ice Cream in a sweet spot](#)
- [Bob Ward & Sons almost 100 years strong](#)
- [Home emporium Zoe holding its own](#)
- [Scooterville is booming](#)
- [Caffe Dolce is betting on getting bigger and better](#)
- [Blue Ribbon Auto Body smoothes out rough situations](#)
- [Temp Right Services is comfortable in green](#)
- [Old Town Creative sells web control](#)

Columnists

- [Green global economy](#)
- [River City Roots festival is MDA's biggest event](#)
- [Beef up your mental fitness](#)
- [Human resource metrics can help your business](#)

City of Missoula

- [Business Licenses and Permits](#)

Business behind the buildings – Beaudette Consulting Engineers building a reputation on solid foundation

By ROB CHANEY



Tom Beaudette, Richard Newman and Matt Schmidt are managing partners of Beaudette Consulting Engineers.
Photo by KURT WILSON/Missoulian

Beaudette Consulting Engineers

- 131 W. Main St., Missoula
- President: Matt Schmidt

Look around the University of Montana and it's easy to see the signs of Beaudette Consulting Engineers' success.

It's the firm that did the design work for the soon-to-be-finished seating addition to Washington-Grizzly Stadium. It also is the way on the steam-tunnel replacement all over the UM campus. This summer, excavation will begin on a new School Education building its engineers designed.

"We do seem to keep our fingernails dirty," BCE President Matt Schmidt said. Since opening in 1991, the firm has grown to 37 engineers and support staff. It is licensed to serve in all 50 states and one Canadian province, and this year opens its fourth branch office in Rapid City, S.D.

"Each branch office is to serve clients we have in those areas better," Schmidt said. "Rapid City is the same concept, but that's also getting us into the Wyoming, Front Range, and Dakotas areas. There's a vacuum in those areas for quality structural engineering. And with all the oil and gas boom going on there, we felt we needed to serve that market better."

Engineers balance on that point between tradition and innovation: They love to break new ground but must maintain rigorous standards, or things fall down.

In the structural engineering business where Beaudette Consulting Engineers thrives, maneuvering on that balance pair

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is a daily pastime. For example, Schmidt said a recent contract for a new visitors center in Grand Teton National Park to the traditional "dark brown boxes" and substituted a more forward-looking facility that still met all the tourists' needs.

At the same time, BCE has had lead responsibilities for historic renovation of Old Faithful Lodge and the Lake Hotel in Yellowstone National Park, as well as other famous buildings in Glacier National Park and Grand Canyon National Park. There, the improvements must make beloved structures strong enough for intensive use without marring their traditional appearance.

BCE recently expanded from four managing partners to 10. The growth reflects both the firm's larger regional presence and its transition into a new era. Founding members Tom Beaudette and Richard Newman are slowly transferring some of their leadership roles to younger engineers, although they remain in the partnership.

Other traditions aren't changing. BCE was named one of the top 15 engineering firms in the nation to work for last year by Structural Engineer Magazine, one of the top industry observers. It's the fifth year in a row it's received that honor.

Schmidt said part of that has to do with BCE's commitment to maintaining a fun atmosphere in which to work. The headquarters building on Main Street features a workout room, a rock-climbing wall and a 25-foot indoor shuffleboard table. The staff also comes together for annual skiing and waterfront parties, raft trips and other outings.

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- Our main goal is to help clients realize their dream: That's paramount.
- Gain and retain the best and brightest engineers: Our assets walk in and out the door in this business.
- No job is too big or too small.
- Clients often lead us to our solutions, so we want to listen.
- Rules are meant to be bent, not broken. For us to be progressive and give our clients the most efficient work possible, we really do have to think outside the box.

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