

Bench marks Streetscapes adds life to outdoor pieces

Outdoors: It's the place to be these days. And Denver entrepreneur James Shaffer is on a mission to make sure that whatever you're doing in outdoor public places — waiting on a bus, eating a burger, parking your bike, shopping at a new lifestyle center or just enjoying the weather — you're doing it in convenient comfort and style.

His company, Streetscapes Inc., is a one-stop shop for the public and private sectors for outdoor furniture and accessories made by a variety of hand-picked manufacturers.



BRIGHT IDEAS

SHARON GILLEN

But, to Shaffer, it's more than selling outdoor furniture and fixtures: "How do we make cities more livable?" he says.

The idea for Streetscapes was born about six years ago when Shaffer was working as a regional and national sales manager for a decorative light-pole manufacturer, which sold primarily to city governments. "I noticed as I was working with the municipalities that a lot of the streetscapes ... didn't go together," he said, because different companies made the benches, lights, trash cans, bus shelters, bicycle racks, signs, etc.

After his company changed hands, he decided to tackle that problem, and last March launched Streetscapes as a broker of sorts for outdoor-furniture manufacturers. On the other side of the equation, the company acts as a middleman for government agencies, developers, landscape architects and others wanting to create outdoor spaces with features that match and are unique, durable and environmentally friendly.

As Shaffer put it, "So it all has the same feel, the same character ... and creates an identity for that neighborhood, that community." Shaffer has been picky when it comes to signing up manufacturers; he has 10 so far. He said there's just so much out there that looks the same, he was determined to find "something different."

And he seems to have succeeded. There's the park bench with heated backrest, the two-story bike rack, semi-circle wire-mesh seating, warming columns, rotating signs, umbrellas that link together to form a chain of shade, and landscape art in all sorts of futuristic shapes and sizes. While many of the products are a bit more conventional than that, Shaffer has made sure that he deals with environmentally friendly manufacturers that are big on sustainability, employ creative designs — many in a contemporary mode — offer easily replaceable parts and can create custom products, such as a bike rack or park bench with a logo integrated into the design.

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DETAILS

Company: Streetscapes Inc.
President/CEO: James Shaffer
Products: Outdoor furniture and landscape accessories.
Employees: 2
Address: 300 S. Jackson St., Suite 100, Denver, CO 80209
Web site: www.streetscapesfurniture.com
Phone: 303-398-7040



James Shaffer of Streetscapes atop a lounge, designed to add an artistic touch to outside furnishings.

RIPE FOR TODS AND LIFESTYLES

Shaffer's business plan has good timing, as transit-oriented developments (TODs), outdoor "lifestyle" shopping complexes and redevelopments such as Union Station and Colfax Avenue put more outdoor public spaces into vogue.

"Part of the equation for getting people out of their cars," Shaffer said, "is providing amenities" for pedestrians, such as attractive benches, water features and planters, which "encourage people to walk by making it more enjoyable ... Are people going to be inclined to go there and hang out?"

Shaffer is confident the increasing focus on outdoor public spaces bodes well for Streetscapes' future.

"I'd be real surprised if a year from now, it wasn't doing a couple of million dollars in sales," he said, projecting \$10 million-\$12 million in sales in three to five years.

The young company admittedly has com-

pleted just a handful of projects, among them the Cycle Safe bike lockers at Northfield Stapleton and decorative street signs in Pensacola, Fla., and St. Louis. Shaffer said he is "talking" with RTD for possible work at the Union Station redevelopment.

Communication Arts, an architecture and graphics design firm in Boulder, has enlisted Streetscapes' help with "retail village" projects in California and Arizona.

Kara Larsen, a designer with the firm, said the company likes the unique designs offered, as well as the materials, such as sustainable wood. "He has some nice contemporary pieces that we like to use a lot," she said.

Grady Huff, design director at Communication Arts, said, "To have a one-point source is the only way to go. It helps on cost and organization."

Irene Borisov, association district manager

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for Colorado Management & Associates, a local property management firm, worked with Shaffer this summer to get benches and trash cans for neighborhood parks at Murphy Creek and Saddle Rock, two subdivisions in Aurora.

"It was a really smooth process," she said, with "very reasonable" prices and "really nice quality" products. Plus, she added, "They had a lot of different styles and colors."

Shaffer said he started the business armed with a database of 50,000 potential clients — from cities and transit agencies to architects and developers. "Networking is really important," he said.

And he keeps busy participating in trade shows, conferences and professional associations.

Shaffer also believes in having a comprehensive Web site, and boasts about the wide range of information on www.streetscapesfurniture.com.

SHARON GILLEN is an associate editor at the Denver Business Journal. Reach her at 303-837-3514 or via e-



James Shaffer says he started Streetscapes because he noticed so many outdoor furnishings — benches, lights, signs, etc. — that just didn't match.

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