

Local Spotlight: Getting to Know **Jim Teece**

## Living the Ashland Dream with Fearless Imagination

By **Jordan Pease** - Feb. 2022 Issue of **Locals Guide Magazine**- Ashland, Oregon



Over 30 years ago, **Jim Teece** and his wife **Dena Matthews** discovered Ashland like many of us Ashlanders did, by stumbling across it. This town has a way of attracting people who 'belong' here. Here in this insightful interview, Jim shares his love of business and community involvement with several anecdotes that typify the people who contribute to the great quality of life we enjoy here.

**Please tell your "how I got to Ashland" story?** My wife, Dena, was getting her master's degree in international management at **Thunderbird University** in Arizona and when she graduated, she surprised me and threw an **Oregonian Newspaper** on my lap and said let's move to Oregon and raise a family. I thought we were going to travel the world and she would be a manager in big companies. While she was getting her degree, I started developing custom software for **Apple Computer, Taco Bell Corp., Pitney Bowes** and **American Express**. I have always had a knack for working with Fortune 500 companies even though I didn't have any formal training or education. I just have "fearless imagination".

Once she saw that we could make a living on what I was able to do, she ok'd my dream. Move to Oregon, live in the woods, write software, and never speak to humans again. I laugh at that last part. I'm an introvert, so the idea of spending all my time in front of the computer inventing the future was very appealing to me back then. Little did I know that I would spend 30+ years speaking to people every day.

This was before the internet. We drove from San Francisco airport to Oregon and visited each town that we could. Most were too small for her. We visited **Roseburg, Eugene, Bend, and Medford**. We gave up and drove back feeling defeated.

She asked if we should stop off in the last town before the border to grab lunch and say goodbye. It was pretty depressing. At lunch I made a napkin list of criteria. I wanted a minivan, a cow and a quiet place to write code. She laughed. Being the smart one she told me to think about infrastructure. We would need **Fed-X**, (again this is before internet), voice mail (which they did not have here back then, we had to buy an answering machine), access to an airport, a small college town, and a brewery. The waitress saw our list and told us we could check off everything right here in Ashland (except for the voicemail.)

That was how Jim & Dena and Project A moved to Ashland. I'm still blown away when I think it has been over 30 years here. No regrets. We love Ashland and all Southern Oregon. It's a wonderful place to raise a family and grow a business or six.

**What's a thing people would never guess about you?** I'm pretty open and transparent so I'm not sure. I think people are surprised when they find out that I don't have a higher education degree yet with what I do for Fortune 500 companies, and have taught classes and serve on **SOU's Foundation Board** for over 20 years. Some people assume I come from money. I'm not sure why. I'm pretty frumpy and frugal in my personal life. But over the years people have commented that they assumed I came from money when I absolutely have not. We were poor.

Another comment people make about me is that they assume before meeting me that I'm a rough, tough businessperson (aka 'a jerk'.) Then they see me speak at a conference or present in a meeting. Some people come up afterwards and they apologize for assuming I was a jerk. I don't know why. I was once at a conference wearing a Project A logo on my shirt in line to check in and a guy walked up and said, "Do you know Jim Teece?" And I sheepishly said yes and he said, "I heard that he's a jerk" and I said, "yeah I heard that too" and smiled the rest of the day. I think that's funny.

**What is a book or movie that's inspired you?** "The Jerk," just kidding. I will tell you that the movie that woke something up inside of me at the age of 13 was "Star Wars". It shocked me awake and changed my life. I wanted to create with my imagination for a living since that day.

**Please tell a story about a life-changing incident, or can you recall a life-changing epiphany?** I was nearing 40. We had small children. Our business was growing like crazy (we grew to 50 employees) and I was burning out fast and hard. We got a deal on an old beat-up RV that barely ran, I told you I was frugal and frumpy, and drove the family on a vacation. While we drove for days and days and camped in crazy places, I did a lot of thinking. I started counting on my hand what was missing from my life. I had so much but felt like I wasn't spending my time in areas that were important to me. Counting with my fingers I decided what those areas were; 1) Education, 2) Small Business, 3) Health Care, 4) Local Government, and 5) Community.

I spent the whole vacation counting and repeating the list over and over and it brought a smile to my face. When we got home, I changed my life. I joined boards such as the **Ashland Chamber of Commerce, SOU, Asante**, and a handful of other non-profits. I joined city and county committees and I intentionally started working with more and more local companies and non-profits. I wasn't burned out from working long hours, I was burned out from working on projects that didn't connect with my soul. That changed my life.

**What are the qualities of the Ashland community you appreciate most?** Ashland was the same size as Bend when we decided to move here. Today Bend is bigger than Medford, and Ashland has kept its growth in check. Some think that is why it costs as much as it does to live here, but with all of Bend's growth it costs the same to live there.

Ashland is a university town. Ashland is an entrepreneurial town. Ashland is a town filled with people that want to live here. Ashland invested in its future 20+ years ago when it built the **Ashland Fiber Network**. Ashland residents vote in support of bond measures for schools over and over again.

**Please share your insight as an internet provider about Ashland's particular internet infrastructure, is it unusual or unique?** 20+ years ago, the City built the Ashland Fiber Network. That is unique. One of my companies, Ashland Home Net, is a partner with the City providing service to people on the network. That is unique. I have learned a lot being an internet service provider, especially during COVID and the fires. The internet is essential. High speed internet is essential.

**The 5G technology that's been rolling out has some Ashland residents concerned. What's your perspective on that, please?** I don't really have a perspective on that. I think that every human has the right to be concerned about technology, its adoption, and its impact on humanity. I want people to constantly push back on our societies addiction to technology upgrades and hold the manufacturers and our government accountable for evaluating and enforcing rules for our safety.

I do think that 5G is an unfortunate collision of marketing terms that popped up on the scene at the same time. There is a technology difference between 5G cellular networks and 5G wireless in your home.

I do not have any concerns personally about either technology. I use my cell phone every day and I have a hard time doing business or taking care of my customers if I'm in an area with little or no cell service or when it has very slow speeds.



**Please tell about a hero or mentor who's influenced you?** I was born in the Philippines. My dad was in the **US Navy** during the **Vietnam War** and met my mom. They got married and had two sons. When his nine years of service was over, he moved us all to Southern California when I was five, he left us when I was nine.

My mom was left alone in **Orange, California**, divorced, not a US citizen and raising four children on her own. She went to night school to become a citizen and then to get her nursing degree while cleaning apartments during the day.

We were poor, children of apartment living, and I was the babysitter when she was gone. She worked hard to raise us four the best she could. Each of us are hardworking, compassionate, married and raising great children.

As my mom nears the end of her life, there isn't a day that goes by that I don't admire and appreciate her sacrifices and hard work as she raised us. She continues to inspire me to this day.

**Please fill-in-the-blank; I'm having the time of my life when I'm [Blank]?** I'm having the time of my life when I'm *working*. My wife and I own **Project A, Ashland Home Net, Rogue Broadband, Umpqua Broadband**, and the **Southern Oregon Business Journal**. I am also a partner of **1000Museums.com** by **Art Authority**. I also proudly serve on the **SOU Foundation Board, Rogue Valley Manor Foundation Board, People's Bank Board**, and the **Northwest Telecommunications and Technology Board**. I'm also launching another new business soon. I work a lot of hours per day. I work every day of the week. I'm proud of the work I do and the work my employees do. I'm proud of the people I serve with on each board. All great humans. They inspire me every day.

I'm having the time of my life when I'm *dreaming*. I have a crazy imagination. My brain is constantly dreaming, constantly surprising me.

I'm having the time of my life when I'm *spending time with family*. I recently became a grandpa with another on the way. My focus has shifted. My next company will be focused on a dream I had when I was a kid.

**What advice do you have for the young people in our community?** I suffer from what I call "Fearless Imagination". I don't jump out of airplanes or free climb dangerous cliffs, but I get the same adrenaline rush from tackling problems and finding solutions.

My suggestion for young people is to just GO! It really is easy to change the world in positive ways. It's easy to make a positive difference. It's easy to inspire others to be good humans. You just need to GO! It's also easy to fail. It's ok to fail. Be good at it. Fail. Get Up. Dust Off. Go again. I fail all the time. It's ok. I get up and keep going. I do not fear failure. Be good at failure. Learn from it.

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