RMEOC
Rocky Mountain Employee Ownership Center

EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP

SUCCESS STORIES IN RURAL COLORADO

EMPOWERED ENERGY SYSTEMS

After **20 years in business**, Danielle Carre and Brad Burritt, owners of Empowered Energy Systems in **Hotchkiss**, faced a challenge familiar to many small business owners—wanting to sell their business as they **reached retirement age.** Brad and Danielle wanted to ensure the company continued to be well-managed, provide stable and well-paying jobs for their workers, and excellent service to clients after they left. They knew of other companies that had successfully become worker-owned co-ops and decided it was the best path for them.

"The employees were intrigued by the idea and had enthusiasm, but they had a lot of questions," they shared. Some were concerned about financial liability, while others were unsure what their role in the company would look like once they became owners. The feasibility study and employee education provided by RMEOC gave employees an idea of what the financials would look like for the purchase and any loans the group might pursue.

Three workers became co-owners, and Brad and Danielle chose to stay on to help new owners adapt and learn before retiring.

"We feel that this is the best transition for this company, both as an exit plan for us and for the future of the employees and the business itself."

FLYIN' MIATA

After **31 years** of building Flyin' Miata into a leading name in performance parts for Mazda Miatas, Bill and Teri Cardell explored selling the business but found that none of the potential buyers could guarantee job security for their employees. For Bill and Teri, that was a dealbreaker. "They've worked with us for forever," Teri shared. "We felt like we owed it to them."

Instead, they sold the **Palisade** business to a core group of **8 employees** who fully took over the company and allowed Bill and Teri to step aside in 2020. For Bill and Teri, that meant securing a **good financial return** while ensuring their **legacy was secure**. "A lot of people were impressed that we went with a co-op," Bill noted. "The Miata community is so thrilled."

The new worker-owners completed RMEOC-led training on how to make efficient group decisions, and how to read and utilize financial statements, ensuring the business remains strong for the long haul. The same year they became a cooperative, they had their **best sales year yet**. "This has been a really amazing process," Jeremy Ferber, long-time employee and new worker-owner reflected.

"We're all very thankful to Bill and Teri for doing this for us. It's an exciting new day for the business."

RMEOC
Rocky Mountain Employee Ownership Center

EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP

MORE SUCCESS STORIES IN COLORADO

PEAK FOOD & BEVERAGE

Kris Oyler, co-founder and CEO of Peak Food & Beverage LLC in **Durango**, started thinking early on about giving employees a real stake in its success. He had seen firsthand how having employees be part-owners improves staff interactions, the work environment, and customer service. "It gives them a much larger sense of accountability", says Oyler.

Oyler was a manager in the company when he had the opportunity to buy a small equity interest, which has substantially grown since. He started inviting other employees to do the same through payroll deductions. Now, the company is **41% employee-owned with over 45 employee-owners**, including brewers, chefs, kitchen managers, waiters, and bartenders, who partake in profits and some level of decision-making. Oyler sees this as a good way to create an exit plan for himself while **not having to give up majority control of the company**.

"We've really reduced turnover, and it shows on the bottom line and our profitability. People just care. They've got skin in the game."

The company now holds 5 restaurants, employs up to 400 full and part-time staffers during the busy summer months, and does six times the revenue it was doing when it started in 1996. Oyler said he never imagined Steamworks would be such a **pillar of the community**.

SEXY PIZZA

Founders Kyle Peters and Kayvan Khalatbari knew that for their business to grow and thrive long-term, they needed to invest in their people. In 2020, after **12 years in business**, Sexy Pizza transitioned to employee ownership through a **phantom stock model**, ensuring every employee who worked at least 20 hours per week for one year could receive shares. The number of shares each person receives depends on length of employment, wage level, and hours worked. Coupled with other benefits, the results are very encouraging: Sexy Pizza's **turnover rate is only around 20%, compared to the 75% industry average**.

"Many restaurants don't feel they have the profits to contribute to a match. But to attract knowledgeable, dedicated staff that will help grow the business, we need to be able to offer these important benefits," Peters said. The company now has 4 locations and around 100 employees. Sexy Pizza also believes these benefits have **helped improve customer service and profitability**. According to Peters, some of the business's best marketing is actually around these benefits, which can attract customers who resonate with the brand mission.

"Everything worthwhile is challenging. [Employee Ownership] has far exceeded our expectations for our business."