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# The wheels of change

Sean Walling and Matt Nyiri have gone from working at Salsa Cycles to owning their own business — Soulcraft, a custom bike building shop

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**S**leek, smart, sophisticated and, oh yeah, fast. No, it's not a sports car description, but what cyclists across the country are saying about bikes made by Soulcraft, a Petaluma-based custom bike builder.

The small two-man workshop on Eastman Lane run by Sean Walling and Matt Nyiri, has been attracting attention lately, and it's no surprise considering the passion the two have for hand-crafting high quality, custom, steel bike frames.

"People seek us out," said Walling, who has over 10 years experience in

was in high school. At 15, he got a job at a bike shop and later went on to learn welding and metal work in college. After college, Walling returned to the North Bay and went to work for Bruce Gordon, a well known local frame builder. "I worked there for a few years and then went to work for Salsa Cycles," he said. "I started there as a painter, then got into frame building. They taught me well."

The Soulcraft company was born two-and-a-half years ago after Walling and Nyiri left Salsa Cycles. At the time, Nyiri worked in frame sales, while Walling was a frame builder. "What happened

*"When people find that they can get a frame made to fit them specifically, they can't believe it. They're happy to find it."*

SEAN WALLING



NINA ZHITO/ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

After aligning the rear wheel droupouts on one of his handcrafted Soulcraft mountain bikes, Sean Walling puts a wheel in place.

ered some friends and attended a trade show; handing out T-shirts and brochures about their frames and new business venture. "We walked around the trade show with frames on our shoulders," he said.

"When a company goes out of business, the people and fans wonder about what happens to the guys making the frames. We had a built-in market for us and so we capitalized

into something," Walling said. "It's definitely a labor of love. It's fun work, but it's a lot of work. I've never owned a business before. This is all I've done since I was 18. It's new in one way, but not so new another. The work isn't new, but the business end is."

Walling said the bikers seeking out Soulcraft frames tend to be serious riders in their 20s and 30s. Over the years,

ple more ways to get to our product. We're finding that balance."

The company's most popular frame is the Option 3 mountain bike. "A lot of people are riding around on a bike that doesn't fit them," he said. "Most people can ride a stock bike with a few adjustments, but people with long legs, short torso, or whatever combination, don't know that they

## BRIEFCA

### Job cuts at Alcatel

Alcatel announced another round of layoffs affecting its wireless access division in Petaluma.

Though the number of jobs eliminated was not released, the layoffs are part of Alcatel's restructuring plan to cut 1,500 jobs in its U.S. operations. Last April, Alcatel announced 93 jobs in Petaluma and another 10 in

### Optime raises \$1 million in funding

Optime Therapeutics, a Petaluma-based biotechnology company, raised \$1 million in its latest round of funding.

The company's goal is to develop novel formulations of established drugs through specialized delivery technology. Optime is focusing on oral drug delivery systems which apply drugs to the ailment instead of through injection.

### AVM Graph

who has over 10 years experience in frame building. "We sell bikes in England, Italy and all over the country. It's nice. I think people really appreciate the fact they can buy something handmade just for them. I also enjoy being able to offer the kinds of things that I like to see as a customer, so we like to give good customer service and a well made product."

Walling has been working on bikes or riding them since he

**SEAN WALLING** "What happened was that Ross the owner sold the company to another company in Minnesota," he explains. "A few years after they took ownership, they shut down the shop in Petaluma."

Having done custom frame work on the side, the closure of Salsa Cycles served to quickly push the two into taking the plunge into business ownership. A few days after Salsa shut down, Walling gath-

frame builder. frames. We had a built-in market for us and so we capitalized on that as much as we could. So now, two-and-a-half years later, here we are still going and growing."

In Soulcraft's first year, the company built 80 frames. The second year they built 150. This year Walling said they're shooting for 300.

The company's name comes from a song title, but the name holds a deeper meaning for Walling and Nyiri. "It's more about putting soul and heart

to be serious riders in their 20s and 30s. Over the years, cyclists go through many bike frames, so finding a sturdy, light-weight frame that's going to last is important. Though materials used for frame building include aluminum and titanium, Soulcraft constructs its frames out of steel.

"What steel has to offer is ride quality," explained Walling. "It's got a nice feel as far as shock absorbers. The frame is flexible enough that it's not such a rough ride. People that call us also find that we're easy to deal with and we stand behind our product."

Soulcraft frames can be ordered directly from the company, but they can also be found in bike shops around the country, including local shops like Santa Rosa Cyclery and the Cambria Bicycle Emporium in Rohnert Park.

Keeping a balance between selling through stores and allowing customers direct access has been difficult, but a successful means of doing business. "It's working out," said Walling. "It's something we had to struggle with. We tried to go directly with selling through dealers but found that we weren't going to make it if we didn't sell direct. We're not taking sales from the dealers, but allowing peo-

short torso, or whatever combination, don't know that they can get a custom frame made. Once they do get one, they can't say enough good things about it. You can't get things that are made to fit in everyday life. Goods in the store such as clothes come right off the rack and aren't made to fit the individual. Getting a bike off a bike rack at a store is no different. When people find that they can get a frame made to fit them specifically, they can't believe it. They're happy to find it."

In addition to mountain bike frames, Soulcraft makes frames in a variety of colors for road bikes, cyclocross, single speeds and women's mountain bikes. "We do a women's mountain bike called Title 9 in four smaller sizes, fitting anywhere from five feet to five foot six," said Walling. "The trend in cyclery has been to make bikes and other items that are designed specifically for women. A lot of times women are riding a short men's bike that's probably going to be too long and not designed around their build. People are realizing women's athletic equipment is a big untapped market."

In addition to tailoring products to the individual, Walling and Nyiri pay a great deal of

See **SOULCRAFT**, page C9

## AVM Graphics fifth anniversary

AVM Graphics of Petaluma celebrates fifth anniversary this month.

The company enters its fifth year with plans to expand its services. Services include Web design.

## Accuchex wins award from AIA

During the American Payroll Association's Payroll Week, Accuchex of Petaluma earned a first place award in the Individual Activity Contest.

Accuchex is an independent payroll management company.

## Top businesses in the county

A number of Petaluma businesses made the list of Sonoma Business Magazine's top 500 businesses in Sonoma County.

Among the local businesses that made the top 500 are: Alcatel USA, Advanced Fibre Communications, Da Farmers of America, Hansel Enterprises, Golden State Lumber, Autoworld Victory Plaza, Illuminations Candles, American AgCredit (Pacific Coast Farm Credit), Midstate Construction, North Construction, Sola O Clover-Stornetta Farms, Cisco Systems, Barb Bakery Inc., Niku Corporation, Spectru Organic Products Inc, G&G Supermarket, Ramoney Corporation,

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