

The Bicycle Tour Company focuses on 'high quality trips'

By Jamie Reed
STAFF WRITER

Sal Lilienthal has seen the world.

For three years — from 1994 to 1996) the Greenwich native traveled the globe as a mechanic on the Motorola cycling team, working side by side with current repeat Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong.

Mr. Lilienthal got to travel to all sorts of great places, but as he put it, he "never got to look around."

That's why, in 1996, Mr. Lilienthal, 33, started the The Bicycle Tour Company with two friends — Dave Bolch, who currently works as a massage therapist with Lance Armstrong on the United States Postal team, and Chann McCrae, who raced this year in the Tour de France.

The company is based in Kent and has already hosted more than 60 tours this year.

Mr. Lilienthal said the business could host more tours, but he chooses not to.

"I definitely held the company back," he said. "I want to keep the quality of the trips really high."

Mr. Bolch and Mr. McCrae are not involved in the day-to-day operation of the company, Mr. Lilienthal said, but they still keep in touch, mainly via the Internet.

Mr. Lilienthal added that the Internet is especially helpful for small businesses such as his because it makes keeping in touch with people throughout the world much easier.

The Bicycle Tour Company is made up of about 15 employees.

Located on Main Street in Kent, the company's office is located in the upstairs of the old Jackeroos building across from Stroble Baking Company.

The business is driven by Mr. Lilienthal's love for biking. It's a love that started when he was only 15 years old.



Stephanie Kouloganis/Spectrum
Sal Lilienthal, above, is the director of The Bicycle Tour Company in Kent.

A bike tour of France inspired him, and the next summer he got a job working for a student hostel-

ing program in Conway, Mass.

Mr. Lilienthal recalls that he wasn't old enough to lead the

tours and as a result got left to do the jobs no one else wanted. He said he loved it anyway.

After graduating from Hobart College in Geneva, N.Y., in 1988, Mr. Lilienthal moved to Burlington, Vt. There, the recently graduated Third World Studies major hoped to get a job as a bartender.

Unfortunately — or perhaps fortunately — he was unable to land a job in the local bars. As a last resort he applied for a job as a mechanic at a bike shop called The Skirack.

One year later, after being in Paris at the right time to see Greg LeMond win the Tour de France by eight seconds, Mr. Lilienthal went on a bike tour across the United States. He got caught in Colorado in October, though.

Rather than brave the snow that was already beginning to fall, he decided to take up residence in Colorado. Not long after, he attended a mechanics clinic at the Olympic training center in Colorado Springs, where he made the connections that would eventually earn him a job with the U.S. national team.

After his time with the national team, and the three years he spent with the Motorola team, Mr. Lilienthal spent a while with the Saturn racing team. It was there that he and Mr. Bolch and Mr. McCrae first thought of The Bicycle Tour Company.

Now the company does trips to France and Spain, and trips to Australia and Italy are in the works.

Mr. Lilienthal is pleased with the number of job applicants the company has had.

"We don't find them," he said of inquiring potential employees. "They find us."

It's no wonder. Who wouldn't want a job where you get to see the world from a bike?

Says Mr. Lilienthal of leading the tours: "It feels like you're taking over the world."