

# Made in **Central Oregon**

## Local Companies Navigating Challenges of Economy

by JOE WILLIS of Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt

**H**ere is the story of two entrepreneurs and their efforts to navigate this tough economy.

### WILLIS BUILDERS TIGHT HOME

Central Oregon custom home and commercial builder of 20 years, Austin Willis, loves to build.

As he describes it, "The thing that excites me most about my work is having the chance to make a positive impact," Willis says. "I love taking a bare lot and building something that will last and be an attractive part of the community for years to come."

of framing to focus on general contracting. As a general contractor, he has completed some 40-plus residential and commercial projects.

But when the bottom fell out of the housing market in Central Oregon — along with the rest of the country — Willis knew he had to get creative, beef up his skill set and expand the scope of his work beyond the new construction that had sustained him and his family.

"It was time to go back to school," says Willis. "And home performance testing is a natural extension of my love for building."

Willis recently completed training and certification in the Building Performance Institute's ENERGY STAR Home Performance program, becoming one of only a handful of certified contractors on the east side of the Cascades with Energy Trust of Oregon's Home Performance with ENERGY STAR program. He and wife, Ann Willis, then launched Tight Home, the new performance testing and tune-up division of Willis Builders.

Using state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment, Tight Home tests and evaluates all components of a home's interior and exterior — from heating and cooling systems to weatherization — to learn how a house uses energy and recommend improvements to help the home work at peak performance. Indoor air quality, mold and other tests and inspections included in the Tight Home review also help ensure the health and safety of everyone living in the home.

Working with a certified Home Perfor-



Joe Willis

mance Contractor such as Willis Builders' Tight Home, means much of the work can be more easily financed through special government-backed loan programs and qualify for tax credits and other incentives. Combined monthly energy cost savings, many Tight Home improvements cost the homeowner little to nothing.

"I want to be a builder for the rest of my career," says Willis. "But Tight Home makes me a better builder and will position

us to be even stronger when the housing and commercial building markets rebound — which we know they will in our area, because all the qualities that attract people to Central Oregon are still here to be enjoyed."

For more details about Willis Builders' Tight Home performance testing and tune-up program, visit [mytighthome.com](http://mytighthome.com) or call 541-317-8331.

### GIANT LOOP MOTORCYCLE GEAR

By his own admission, Tumalo fine artist and graphic designer David Wachs bit off more than he could chew when he borrowed deeply to finance a major remodel of his ranch farmhouse. Like so many others, he found himself unable to keep up with house payments when his primary source of work — marketing for developers — dried up within a matter of months.

Meanwhile, longtime friend and motorcycle riding buddy Harold Olaf Cecil of Bend was searching for an entrepreneurial opportunity to supplement his small but thriving marketing business. Talking on the

phone together in the spring of 2008, the two realized that the solution to both of their financial needs and desires could possibly be sitting right in front of them, with Wachs's innovative motorcycle saddlebag design he had developed for his own use.

The two motorcycle enthusiasts quickly turned their passion into a startup company, dubbed Giant Loop after the long-distance off-road motorcycle tours that inspired the saddlebag design.

A little more than a year later, Giant Loop is now a self-sustaining enterprise driven by fast-growing sales of the company's soft luggage to riders in more than 20 countries and throughout the United States.

"One of our customers is an international banking executive based in India," says Wachs. "He uses our company as an example of American ingenuity in the face of adversity."

Hard work and entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Central Oregon.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF WILLIS BUILDERS



Austin Willis, owner of Willis Builders.

Willis started his construction career as a framer in 1986. As an independent framing subcontractor, he mastered the craft while framing more than 100 homes in Central Oregon, including intricate custom homes in areas such as Sunriver, Awbrey Butte and Brasada Ranch.

In 1995, Austin built his first turnkey home in Bend and began phasing out