

Mark Kozak

TAKING TSRC TO THE NEXT LEVEL

WORDS Evie Carrick | IMAGE Barton Glasser

BEFORE MOVING TO TOWN IN 2009, MARK KOZAK ALREADY HAD QUITE A BIT IN COMMON WITH THE STEREOTYPICAL TELLURIDIAN. HE'D HELD AN UNTRADITIONAL ARRAY OF JOBS INCLUDING CAPTAINING SAILBOATS, FORECASTING AVALANCHES, AND WORKING FOR TWO STARTUP SOFTWARE COMPANIES. MOST RECENTLY, HE'S TAKEN ON THE WORLD OF MOLECULAR SCIENCE AS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE TELLURIDE SCIENCE RESEARCH CENTER (TSRC).

If his varied career wasn't enough, Mark also had a deep love for snow, and not just in the way most powder hounds do. In graduate school, he spent three years studying how meteorological factors impact the variability of snow layer hardness and its potential affect on skier-triggered avalanches. He also worked as a senior heli-ski guide in Alaska, which is how he ended up in Telluride.

Mark moved to town for love. His wife, Robyn Shaw, is a co-owner and designer at Tweed Interiors. The two met through Brian and Hilaree O'Neill, Telluride locals who guided alongside Mark in Alaska. "I do take pride in the fact that I'm probably one of the few skiers who didn't move here for skiing," laughed Kozak.

Like most, it took a bit of time for Mark to find his perfect career in Telluride. He spent time working remotely for a supply-chain consulting firm in Denver and consulting for the Colorado Energy Group. He joined up with TSRC in 2014 as the Development Director, and started his current role with the organization in April of 2015.

"I feel like I'm a good fit for TSRC because of my science and business background and because I love connecting people with other people and ideas. It is very gratifying to help others make progress by bringing them together with the people and resources they need to succeed," said Kozak.

This is quite simply what TSRC does and does well. They connect molecular scientists from all over the world in an intimate, comfortable environment that breeds open communication and the sharing of ideas and unpublished research. These workshops are often the birthplace for new ideas, research developments, and partnerships in molecular science that ultimately have an impact on technological advancements, which include everything from energy generation and storage, to better performing materials, to nanodevices to treat disease.

"I want the Telluride community to feel a sense of pride that the new ideas and international partnerships that are developed at TSRC are making a

global impact on humanity and the planet. We as a community are helping to make the world better by hosting scientists and creating an atmosphere that nurtures friendly exchanges, inspiration, and innovation," noted Kozak.

While the facilitation of meetings between molecular scientists is a huge part of the job, most people in Telluride know TSRC for its local impact, most notably the close partnership with the Pinhead Institute. TSRC scientists volunteer for Scholars in the Schools and Pinhead Punk Science. The organization also provides opportunities for the Pinhead Internship Program and sponsors weekly TSRC Town Talk lectures over the summer.

With an increasing interest in TSRC's programs, the organization is poised for growth, which is one thing Mark wants to navigate carefully. "We have to recognize that while we're very willing to grow, we do not want to do so at the expense of what makes TSRC special. Over the course of 32 years, our scientists are really responsible for making TSRC what it is. We are looking to our community of scientists to define how we can make the organization even stronger," explained Kozak. "For the first time in the organization's history we've published an annual report to document who we are. We are now focused on a strategic planning effort, that involves scientists and community members, to define what we can improve and how, as an organization, we can make the greatest impact on advancing molecular science."

The act of moving forward, regardless of what choices TSRC inevitably makes, is something Mark is prepared to pilot. One could argue that his life path has almost perfectly prepared him for the job. He's got the science background and education, which was instigated by his father, a biochemist and molecular geneticist. His long journey to TSRC provided him with the leadership experience that came from captaining boats, guiding clients in the mountains, managing large software development teams, and building startups. With such a varied, yet perfect resume, it's easy to be convinced that if anyone's up for the challenge of making a great organization like TSRC even better, it's Mark. ■

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