

LOCAL

How Mayfly Outdoors grew and thrived



Photos by **WILLIAM WOODY**/Special to the Sentinel

David Drago, president of Mayfly Outdoors, an outdoor manufacturing company, stands on the factory floor of on the campus in Montrose.



What were the factors that brought some large companies to Colorado's Western Slope?

COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Mayfly Outdoors

What they do: Rehabilitate distressed outdoor companies, with a focus on high-end fly-fishing gear.

Founded: 2012

Company headquarters: 1101 Mayfly Drive, Montrose, CO 81401

Number of employees: 125

Website: <https://mayflyoutdoors.com>

Montrose business went from 17 to 125 workers

By **SAM KLOMHAUS**

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When asked how his successful outdoor manufacturing company Mayfly Outdoors came to be, founder David Drago is both direct and coy. “I just filled out the form with the secretary of state,” Drago said. Drago and Mayfly have made their names turning around businesses in the outdoor industry.

Mayfly started off with 17 employees at its inception, but has increased to about 125. It has been named one of Colorado’s top privately owned companies and one of Colorado’s top family owned companies by ColoradoBiz, along with a host of other awards.

“We didn’t know how big it would get,” Drago said.

There are three companies under Mayfly: Abel, Ross Reels and Airflo.

Abel manufactures and sells high-end fly fishing reels and tools. Its products include reels decorated via artistic collaborations with the likes of the Grateful Dead, AC/DC and Johnny Cash.

Abel employs about 50 people worldwide and has been in business since 1980. It was originally headquartered in Southern California, and was the first company purchased by Mayfly, in 2012.

Ross Reels, a fishing reel manufacturer, has been headquartered in Montrose for more than 30 years, and was purchased by Mayfly in 2015, prompting the company’s

move from its original home in Colorado Springs to Montrose.

Airflo, a fishing tackle company based in the United Kingdom, was purchased by Mayfly in 2019. Airflo has been manufacturing PVC-free fishing lines since 1984.

Dragoo said they focus on premium products and pushing up-market.

“We make everything we sell,” Drago said.

Unlike a lot of companies, Mayfly has grown and even thrived during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drago said they’ve essentially had five years of growth in one year.

Dragoo attributes this growth to Mayfly being a vertically integrated company, which takes away some of the supply chain issues facing other companies, and also to the increased interest in outdoor recreation during the pandemic.

Through the company’s life and growth cycle, Drago said sometimes the circumstances have changed, but the business model has always been viable.

“We’re able to deliver on time and we have the best product, we’ll always be able to grow because we do those two things well,” Drago said.

Part of the reason for that, Drago said, is that he’s both a producer and a consumer, which makes it easier to understand customers and products.

“Being a consumer of the products first, I knew where the pain points were,” Drago, who grew up in Colorado, said.



Workers run precision machines to turn bar stock steel into fly fishing reels at Mayfly Outdoors, an outdoor manufacturing company located in Montrose. Below, metal components used to assemble fly fishing reels are ready for assembly.

A lifelong fly-fisherman, Drago said he likes to fish in the Uncompahgre River through town, the high country in the summer and the Gunnison River in the fall.

Since the move in 2015, the community has kept Mayfly in Montrose, Drago said.

“We came and we found the employees were wonderful, the city was awesome, and we thought ‘what a great little city’ and decided to stay,” Drago said.

“The company does a really good job in Montrose, and its underlying value has been to create a difference down here,” Drago said.

Mayfly is the anchor tenant for Colorado Outdoors, a 160 acre “opportunity zone” located along the Uncompahgre River in Montrose that



Association and other organizations dedicated to conserving fisheries and growing the sport of fishing. It also contributes 10% of each sale to the Sport Fish & Wildlife Restoration Program.

Abel has created custom reels to help fundraise for Rivers of Recovery, Project Healing Waters, Casting for Recovery, the Sportsman’s Alliance of Alaska and the Western Rivers Conservancy.

Abel is notable for manufacturing its fly lines using polyurethane instead of PVC, which according to Abel’s website can leach harmful toxins into the water as the line ages.

According to its website, Mayfly’s mission is to “inspire adventure.” In Montrose, it seems to have found a suitable home to do just that.

includes other outdoor manufacturers such as the Colorado Yurt Company, about 40 acres of open space, residential units and other businesses. The groundbreaking for a 50,000-square-foot outpatient medical center is scheduled for today.

Dragoo said the company tries to be an advocate for increased and inexpensive outdoor access. Mayfly has often been recognized as one of Colorado’s most community-oriented companies.

Ross Reels sponsors the Fly Fishing Film Tour and is a supporter of Trout Unlimited, the International Game Fish