



The Montana District Office (MDO) Monthly Focus is our opportunity to explore and highlight different elements that contribute to Montana’s economy. MDO Monthly Focus is intended to highlight small businesses and our partners to inspire and encourage small business development and growth in different areas of the economy.

For more information about SBA and the Montana District Office Team, please visit: [Montana District Office](#)

Construction in Montana



Montana Construction

Construction has always been a major piece of our country’s history and a vital contributor to the economy of the nation, with nearly 3/4 of a million firms employing over seven million employees, creating \$1.4 trillion worth of structures annually, according to the American Construction Association (ACA).

However, during the pandemic construction’s growth, like the growth of other industries, has been limited due to issues with our supply chains.

As we enter the new normal there is still a lot of uncertainty about what things will be like moving forward, but one thing is for sure, construction is more important than ever. There is a need for more housing, the building of medical centers, and new buildings for mixed uses with retail on the main floor and housing and office space on the levels above.

In Montana, construction is just as important. Nearly 5,500 firms employ over 30,000 Montanans, making a higher median pay than the median for all employees in the state, and having an overall impact of \$3.2 billion on our GDP according to the ACA.



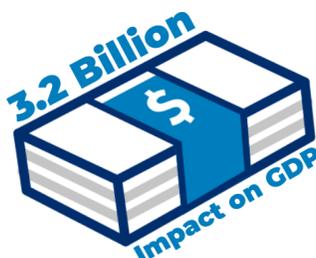
30,000

CONSTRUCTION



Over 5,500

COMPANIES



Montana’s Housing Industry

We mentioned the importance of construction, especially the need for more housing in our state and our communities. We simply do not have enough houses in our inventory, nor do we have enough affordable options for our workforce, fixed-income, retirees, specials needs, etc.

There are currently 519,938 housing units in our state, according to the latest US Census numbers, with more being built every day.

Median home values change daily and vary based on county or community. Currently, Montana’s median home value is over \$255,000, and there are a few communities where home values are much higher; like Bozeman, Whitefish, and Bigfork.

These housing prices have pushed some Montanans from their homes and into the surrounding towns where the inventory is running low and prices are increasing, forcing those communities to find solutions to our housing crisis.

Some officials are looking to programs to help developers and businesses form to tackle this problem of a lack of housing inventory and a lack of affordable options.



Business: Foothold

Location: Butte, MT

Website: www.BuildFoothold.com

Owner: Hannah Van Wetter & Sam Atkins

Description: Foothold is a Montana based company building high quality, sustainable, and affordable prefabricated homes in Southwest Montana to serve our growing communities. Foothold specializes in high performance, prefabricated homes, that are built in a warehouse in the Montana Connections Business Park just outside of Butte, MT. Their goal is to provide housing for the “Missing Middle.” The homes come with their own hot water heater, washer and dryer, and can be transported anywhere and placed on any standard foundation.

Five Questions with Hannah & Sam

1. What does Foothold mean to you?

“Housing is an economic development issue. We realized that **there is a lack of housing that meets the needs of our community.**” says owners Sam and Hannah who founded Foothold. Hannah has a history in contracting, while Sam has a business background. “We are committed to providing housing for the missing middle class.”

2. What happened in the last 18 months that changed your business?

“**The pandemic is what spurred us to act.** We noticed there was Section 8 housing and massive homes being built on large pieces of land, but nothing for those in the middle, so in June, 2021 Foothold was born.” When asked if they’ve had any issues finding workforce, they answered “actually no, surprisingly enough! We’ve invested in our human capital, we have B-corp status, and we pay a living wage, offering benefits, and paid leave.”

3. How did the SBA impact your business?

“We worked with SBA-funded resources, like **Julie Jaksha from the Butte SBDC office. She was a lifesaver.**” They also worked with other resource partners in the area like Joe Willauer from Headwaters RC&D and Brian Sullivan from the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center in Butte.

“Housing is an economic development issue”

Sam Adkins, Co-owner

4. What does the future hold?

“We moved into this space in June, and now **due to the steady flow of orders, we are preparing to move into a larger space** that is three times the size of the space we are in.” Foothold currently employs 7 people, they leveraged the state’s job creation grant with hopes to hire three more by year’s end, then double that in a year. They have four models of homes ranging from 400 square feet to 1200 square feet.

5. What piece of wisdom would you give the someone getting ready to start a business?

“Surround yourself with a good team. We worked hard to provide a team atmosphere by hiring those who are not only dedicated to what we are doing, but enthusiastic as well. Don’t forget to seek out resources within your community”. Sam and Hannah also stressed not to listen to the naysayers, **“keep going despite what they say, its all systems go!”**



Business: Custom Construction

Location: Butte, MT

Website: www.Facebook.com/Custom-Construction-1724642837843055

Owner: Brent Giop and Mike Swanson

Description: Brent and Mike have been building homes for as long as they can remember, working for private contractors and larger companies before setting out on their own to start Custom Construction four years ago. They are a unionized business with 7 employees that work with local contractors, to build anything from homes and apartments, to offices and large buildings.

Five Questions with Brent & Mike

1. What does Custom Construction mean to you?

“We take a lot of pride in what we do, and *we pride ourselves in being fair and honest*. We know how important a home is to someone, especially those with families.” says Custom Construction co-owner Mike Swanson.

2. What happened in the last 18 months that changed your business?

“We had the same problem as everyone else, shortage of workers. Feels like people aren’t as interested in the trades as much anymore. They don’t make the trades, like construction, a priority in our schools, so kids don’t get exposed to it.” said Mike Swanson. “Another problem was we had trouble getting ahold of the stuff we needed, like tools and materials. We would order something and were told it would take 8 weeks when it would normally take two weeks.”

3. How did the SBA impact your business?

“With help from our bookkeeper and our banker, *we applied for the loans from the Paycheck Protection Program and it was forgiven*. Custom Construction also received guidance from SBA resource partners at the Montana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Butte.

“we pride ourselves in being fair and honest”

Mike Swanson, Co-owner

4. What does the future hold?

“We are working on a lot of projects right now , but *to be honest, we could be doing more*. If we could hire a few more people and get our materials in faster, we could be building more houses.”

5. What piece of wisdom would you give the someone getting ready to start a business?

“*If you have an idea for a business, don’t wait*. We are both in our forties, and we should have done this twenty years ago,” says Brent Giop. “Hire a good team that you can rely on, because if you invest in them, they’ll invest in your business and they’ll stick around,” says Mike Swanson.