



*Spencer Comerford on the job*

# RAIN OR SHINE

by Amanda C. Mitchell / photos by Thomas Roshkind

## Cordillera's paperboy delivers

IT IS 6:45 A.M. AND THREATENING RAIN, not uncommon for an August morning in the Rocky Mountains. At the Comerford household, however, ten-year-old Spencer is all business, undaunted by the impending storm. With an official *Denver Post* paperbag slung over his shoulder, Spencer talks with *Cordillera Living* briefly, then authoritatively mounts his motorized scooter and takes off down the road as he has every morning this summer.

We quickly pursue this determined young businessman as he zips toward the Valley Club gatehouse. Although we manage to pass him in our four-wheel drive vehicle, Spencer stays close even up the incline just west of the guard gate. The photographer grabs his camera to snap a few photos of Spencer roaring up the hill on his scooter.

In his living room a few weeks later, Spencer captivates with details of his start-up business, a story that in many ways resembles those told by CEOs around the globe. It all began with a deal.

In the spring of 2001, Jim Comerford struck a deal with his son, who was eager to acquire his soon-to-be-replaced lap-top computer. The price tag was \$500. How would a young boy make \$500 during his summer vacation?

Dad suggested a paper route. Cordillera's homeowners had long lamented the lack of home newspaper delivery. Newspaper companies claimed that the low number of year-round subscribers in Cordillera made such delivery unworkable, so they brought newspapers only as far as the guard gates, where subscribers had to go to retrieve their papers.

Spencer remembers his father suggesting the paper route but in the same breath adding, "You'll never be able to get up that early." Did Spencer take up the challenge to solve his financial dilemma or to prove his father wrong?

Anyone who observes the young entrepreneur on a typical work day can see that this charming, serious-faced boy is an achiever. He is also a budding businessman, and every great businessman must have a plan and that plan an impetus.

Spencer opted for a direct marketing approach. "I went to all of the houses, introduced myself, and gave them a flyer," he explains.

Persistent Spencer lined up eight customers for the summer. Each paid \$20 per month for newspaper delivery between 7:00 and 7:45 a.m., seven days a week. Every client received a complimentary copy of the *Vail Daily* along with his or her subscription to the *Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, or *New York Times*.

Starting June 3, Spencer's daily routine took shape: the 6:45 a.m. alarm, 7:00 a.m. departure from home into the chilled morning air to begin his route, and 7:45 a.m. return home to re-charge his scooter for the next work day. He recalls the first day on the job with a bright smile, "The sky was cool that early in the morning, a pinkish-orangeish."



Spencer enjoyed the smiles and waves from neighbors, restaurant employees, and gate attendants who grew accustomed to seeing the Valley Club paperboy each day. "Bart would even invite me into his office to talk," Spencer recalls of Chaparral Manager Bart Sigler. Spencer delivered to the Chaparral in exchange for a complimentary lunch once a week.

His friends could hardly believe that Spencer would give up part of his summer to pursue the paper route. "Everyone thought I would sleep in; they all doubted me," he says with a slight shrug. Spencer actually enjoyed a longer summer because he accomplished so much early in the day. "I still had plenty of time for the pool," he says. Convincing his friends to have sleepovers at his house worked most of the time, although he did miss a few sleepovers. Twice he called on a substitute paperboy, neighbor Connor White, so he could attend special spend-the-night parties. "I gave him \$5 per day, which was more than I made in a day," Spencer explains in a business-like tone, "but I think that's good."

When asked about his greatest challenges, Spencer's large blue eyes widen behind his oval glasses. He thoughtfully replies, "How cold it was. I wore the thickest clothes and always had numb hands." The second impediment, he said, was "my alarm clock. I tried to stop myself from pressing the off button because I didn't want to sleep in." Next summer he plans to place the clock across the room from his bed.

What did Spencer learn this summer about running a business? "Economic stuff," he says. "I had to keep on track and make sure it was done, or I would get a bad name for my business. I knew I had to be really organized." He sighs and looks to the ceiling as he adds, "Paying off stuff is pretty stressing."

Invoicing his customers, collecting payments, and making installments on the computer tested Spencer's accounting skills. Luckily, math is his favorite subject.

In his yellow Gap tee-shirt and stylish, wire-rimmed glasses, Spencer in some ways epitomizes an American ten-year-old. He plays both hockey and soccer, excels in academics, fights with his twin sister Kelsey, and enjoys building contraptions with his Lego collection. Spencer surpasses his years, however, in his determination and appreciation for what he calls "independent business and free enterprising."

Reflecting on his summer, Spencer passes on some advice to other entrepreneurs: "Never give up. I did not give up on this newspaper route, and a lot of people thought I would. I proved them wrong and learned that I can do whatever I want." He adds with a thoughtful gaze, "I'll choose the way my life goes."

Who could doubt such a confident young person with so many successes already? The paper route is not Spencer's only business pursuit. In 2000, he sold golf balls and lemonade to golfers on the Valley Course to buy his \$250 scooter. That scooter, he notes with a shy smile, "turned out to be a good investment, given the newspaper business." Spencer also found the time and energy this summer to run two other businesses: washing and detailing automobiles for \$60 per car and watering indoor plants at \$2.50 a day.

Now that he has purchased the lap-top from his father, Spencer plans to put it to good use: "games, the Internet, and school work."

Next summer, "can-do" Spencer hopes to increase his distribution to 12 clients. In preparation, he plans to increase the speed and endurance of his already-powerful scooter. Beyond that, who knows what the future has in store for him — or, more likely, what Spencer has in store for the future. ☺



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