

An Oral History of Tim Conder

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

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TIM CONDER

Interviewed on April 10, 2012
Alexandra Horangic, Interviewer

Born in Salt Lake City, Tim Conder grew up in California and worked for many years as a carpenter and cement mason. In 2008, he became a co-owner of Bootleg Courier, located at 545 East Fourth Street, in a space known as Cuddleworks. The building also houses studio space for artists and a coffee roasting operation.

Photo by Patrick Cummings

Horangic: I'm here with Tim Conder, who's the co-owner of Bootleg Couriers. We are on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno and today is Tuesday, April 10, 2012. I'd like to start with where and when were you born.

Conder: In Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1983.

Horangic: How long did you stay in Salt Lake?

Conder: Three years.

Horangic: Where did you go from there?

Conder: Central Valley in California, a bit east of the Bay Area, forty-five minutes east of San Francisco.

Horangic: What city?

Conder: Tracy.

Horangic: How long did you live in Tracy?

Conder: I moved away when I was sixteen, so a pretty long time. Most of my childhood and adolescence.

Horangic: Were you into riding bikes then?

Conder: No, I mostly just skateboarded and I wouldn't say that I rode bikes any more than any average young person.

Horangic: Did you go to high school there?

Conder: Partly.

Horangic: Then where did you go from there?

Conder: I dropped out. Well, I got kicked out of high school, and then I came here and went to Reno High for about a month.

Horangic: Did you graduate?

Conder: No. I got my GED.

Horangic: Do you think that affected how you progressed through life?

Conder: Yeah, I'd say so. Definitely.

Horangic: In what way?

Conder: I was done with school by the time I was sixteen, so I grew up a little bit faster and started working young and hung out with older people. I'd say it affected me, definitely. I didn't at that time, have any interest in higher education or anything like that.

Horangic: What kind of work did you do?

Conder: I became a carpenter and cement mason pretty quickly after that.

Horangic: In Reno?

Conder: Yeah, I started that in Reno and then moved away from Reno and joined the Carpenters Union in Berkeley, California, and did that for about five years.

Horangic: Where in Berkeley did you live?

Conder: I lived in Oakland, but I worked out of Berkeley. I lived off of Piedmont Avenue, north Oakland, on the border of Oakland and Berkeley.

Horangic: What was that like?

Conder: It was good. I like Oakland a lot. I've lived there at a couple different points in my life in different areas.

Horangic: So you started in Tracy, and then you went to Oakland, where did you go after that?

Conder: Came here to Reno.

Horangic: So you came here to Reno, and then you went back to Oakland.

Conder: Yeah, then I moved to Oakland.

Horangic: Then where did you go?

Conder: Then I moved to Portland, and then I spent a little bit of time traveling on the East Coast between New York, New Orleans, and Midwest areas like Minneapolis, and then moved to San Francisco.

Horangic: What year did you move to San Francisco?

Conder: It was five or six years ago—2006, I believe.

Horangic: As you were moving around, were you just doing odd jobs like masonry?

Conder: I started in the union here in Reno and then moved unions to Berkeley. When I left Berkeley Cement, I was doing large-scale building art projects, around the country for a long time. I was no longer in the union, but I was still building things, but mostly, grant work and grant-funded art projects.

Horangic: What were some of the projects?

Conder: I did something for Burning Man in 2000, this big Spanish galleon called the La Contessa. I worked for other artists in Oakland, doing some welding on top of my day-to-day job.

Horangic: When you did the Burning Man project, were you based out of Oakland?

Conder: Yeah, that's basically when I moved from Reno to Oakland and why. It was 2000, I believe. So I did that project and then stayed in Oakland and helped different art groups with similar types of projects—not boats, but large-scale builds. Then when I went to New York, I was part of this thing called Swimming Cities. It's this girl Swoon, she does it.

Horangic: What is that?

Conder: She builds ships out of junk and takes them to different places around the world, sails them and then treats them as a docked installation. She did it on the Hudson in New York. She did it through the Venice Canal and down the Mississippi.

Horangic: Oh, wow.

Conder: Yeah.

Horangic: That probably got a lot of press.

Conder: Yeah, totally. It was a big deal, and she's trying to do it again.

Horangic: What was her point?

Conder: She is an East Coast-based artist, and there's a lot of steam punk kids that she would come into contact with through traveling who do that down the Mississippi every year.

Horangic: Could you describe what steam punk kids are?

Conder: It's a traveling punk kid that builds all their own stuff. They travel from the Midwest, cities like Minneapolis or Milwaukee or wherever up north on the Mississippi, and they build these Huckleberryesque rafts and boats and sail down the Mississippi to New Orleans for the winter, and work in New Orleans in the winter and then hop trains.

Horangic: So as a mode of transportation and livelihood?

Conder: Uh-huh. Usually just one way, and then the other way they would hop trains to get back to Minneapolis.

So, anyway, she met these people through her own travels and her own friend group, and decided it would be really cool to recreate these boats by having different artists design and lead their own build, and then together create the full project, which was Swimming Cities that she was the lead on. She got it funded and did it three times.

Horangic: What project was the most influential one on you during this time period?

Conder: I feel like they were all fairly equal. They were all in the same sphere. It was all related and all the people who were working on these projects were similar—if not the same people, or at least from the same group of artists. They were all really cool and you could take different things from each of them, for sure.

Horangic: How did you get into that in the first place?

Conder: The person who got me into being a cement mason was one of my best friends. He worked for Burning Man in the early years helping build and set up the city out on Black Rock, on the playa.

Horangic: What year was that?

Conder: It was 1998, and through him, I met some of these people. A lot of the people who used to work for Burning Man years ago were nomadic workers, a nomadic steam punk workforce, you know, and they would pick beets in the North in the spring, and then go bartend in the winter in New Orleans. They would always come build Burning Man in the summer, basically set up a welding shop out there and help build the roads and whatever. They would cycle this way for years. Burning Man started out in Black Rock in 1992 and since then until about 2001 they sort of stopped it. Now that workforce

is mainly populated by people from Reno or peripherally from that group of first-comers.

So, through him I met all these artists the first year that I went out there, which was 2000 or 1999. I knew how to build because that's what I was doing for a living, and took a liking to it and started seeing where I could help with it. In 2001, I wrote a big grant to fund this ship that I built with two other people.

Horangic: What was the name of that ship?

Conder: The La Contessa.

Horangic: Was it at Burning Man?

Conder: Yes.

Horangic: Was it one of the burned pieces?

Conder: No.

Horangic: How did you go about getting a grant? What was that process like?

Conder: In that year they had just began BRAF, which was Black Rock Arts Foundation. They had established a grant board and I knew the people on the board. They had a large pool of money that they had designated from ticket sales that they were going to give to artists. But like I was saying, it's this small community of artists. Now the community's obviously much larger as Burning Man's reach extends further and further, but at that time, it was Bay Area/California-based and large-scale sculpture artists, so it was a fairly small pool.

I didn't write the grant, but I did the design for the ship, and we received the grant super easily. I think, to date, it might be one of the larger grants Burning Man has ever given, not because we wrote such a good grant or it was such a good project, but after that they started thinking, "Oh, we're giving people crazy amounts of money. We could dole out less money to more projects," which is what they do now. Although they still give the most amount of money of any privately owned company in the country to artists.

Horangic: You were based in Oakland during this?

Conder: Sort of. I was between Reno and Oakland.

Horangic: Your mom lives in Reno?

Conder: Uh-huh.

Horangic: And your dad lives where?

Conder: He lives in the Bay Area.

Horangic: Were you riding bikes during this whole time?

Conder: I was. Some of these artists had started a bike club in Minneapolis, and it made its way to New York and other parts of the country, and we brought it into Reno, and started building mutant bikes and tall bikes. That is what got me really heavily into riding bikes.

Horangic: Was that influenced by Burning Man?

Conder: Well, by the people who came to Burning Man. But there's this bike club called—it was originally called the Hard Times Bike Club, now it's Black Label Bike Club, that came from Minneapolis and it started other small chapters around the country. There's one here in Reno now, or there has been for about ten years.

So that's how I got heavily into bikes, for sure.

Horangic: What transitioned you from Oakland back to Reno?

Conder: Over the course of time I moved back from San Francisco to Reno. I was working as a bike messenger in San Francisco for three or four years, and my girlfriend, who was born in San Francisco, was tired of living there, so we decided we were going to take a trip to Europe for six months.

At the time, my mom was sick, so I said, "Well, we should go to Reno and see my mom, and maybe I could work for a couple of months. We could stay with her and save some more money." We had saved a bunch of money and decided that we would do that. We got to Reno, and Bootleg had already been started by these other two guys very recently. It was about four months old at that time.

Horangic: Who had started Bootleg Couriers?

Conder: Doug Moore and Chad Strand. They had started it about four months prior to me moving back here, and I had heard of it when I was in San Francisco through mutual bike messenger friends. Chad worked as a bike messenger in Seattle and that community is fairly small.

When we got back, my girlfriend at the time really liked it here, and I felt like I could buy into Bootleg and become a part of it and make it successful because of my experience as a bike messenger. So my girlfriend and I talked about it and decided to stay in Reno.

Horangic: This was about 2008?

Conder: Uh-huh, it was 2008.

Horangic: So you bought into the company. How did that all work?

Conder: Doug didn't have any experience as a bike messenger and he had never owned a business before. He was a very personable guy, and he was feeling the role as marketing

person/personality. Chad had worked as a bike messenger in Seattle, but only for a year, and he had been riding bikes recreationally and racing bikes for a really long time, so that was his expertise.

I think they quickly realized that I understood the courier industry more than they did at the time, just because I had been in it for longer and I worked for a really small cooperative bike messenger company in San Francisco that was run really similarly called Cupid Courier. I'd worked for three different companies in San Francisco that were all very, very different—a mom and pop, a LLC big conglomerate, and then this small cooperative.

I think they both saw that I had knowledge in some areas that maybe they didn't. Plus I had saved up all this money, so I basically gave them a bunch of money, and they were really into that. [laughter]

Horangic: As most people are.

Conder: Yeah, right? They were totally into that and it actually worked out really well. So I bought in and it was the three of us for about a year.

Horangic: And is Doug no longer a part of it?

Conder: No, he's no longer a part of it. Chad and I bought him out a year and a half ago.

Horangic: Were the terms he left on friendly?

Conder: No, it wasn't friendly. [laughs]

Horangic: What happened?

Conder: He wasn't suited to the business aspect of it. He's a little older. Well, he's a bit older than Chad and I and has a couple of kids, so he has way different priorities and interests, which is completely reasonable, and it wasn't working because we weren't in a place to make a ton of money. I don't think he realized what it takes to operate a start-up, especially a start-up that is never going to make a ton of money. I don't think he was prepared for how long he was going to have to go on subsistence living, especially with a family at home.

That became really stressful to him and influenced his decision-making process and the direction he wanted to take Bootleg, which was completely different than the direction Chad and I wanted to take it. We're both young single guys and can go a long time running it the way that we want to run it which is not doing any advertising, not having some crazy office and not doing process service, which is a big part of our industry that's shitty and shady.

Horangic: What is process service?

Conder: It's serving divorce papers to people. You have to be licensed to do it. Serving custody papers, lawsuits, or eviction notices.

Horangic: Papers people aren't happy to get?

Conder: Yeah, exactly. Papers people are not happy to get. It's a lot more money, but it's really expensive. The licensing process is really expensive. It's an enormous drain on your resources. The payoff is definitely bigger than for regular documents, but for us it just wasn't what we wanted to do.

Horangic: What do you guys want to do? What's Bootleg Couriers' mission statement?

Conder: I would say that we offer reliable, detail-oriented, eco-friendly delivery service.

Horangic: How are you guys doing?

Conder: Good. We're super successful. It's been great. We've reached our target growth rates every year and exceeded them by quite a bit. We employ three people now, not including Chad and myself, which obviously are not employed.

Horangic: Who are the other employees? I know Casey Clark's one of them.

Conder: Casey Clark, Dre Ballard, and Clark Demaret, who basically just drives for us here and there. So we're able to employ some people. It's kind of been the backbone of this new venture that Chad and I started on Fourth, and we have eighty-five clients. We don't do process service. I would say 90 percent of our business is legal, and the other 20 percent is medical, and 1 percent is produce and foods. We deliver large bulk orders for the Great Basin Food Co-op on a super small scale, but they have this grant through UNR to do a farmer-to-restaurant distribution center. If they're able to get that off the ground like they plan to, it'll be a much larger part of our business, because we'll end up doing their delivery service from the farms to the food co-op and then they'll fill orders from there and we'll deliver it to restaurants in the community.

Horangic: Would that be bike-based or would you be driving?

Conder: It would be driving to all the farms, but then all bike-based from the co-op to the restaurants. We'll see how that goes for them. It's definitely a pilot program. They received a very large grant to do the pilot program, but so far it's a little lackluster.

Horangic: Do you think the eco-friendly aspect of your company has been key to its success?

Conder: No, I would say honestly, it's just something for our clients to talk about at dinner parties.

Horangic: Really? [laughs]

Conder: They don't care. No one ever hires us because of that, ever. We maybe have one

client because of it. I would say it might actually be a deterrent for many, because they don't think that we're capable of staying on a time schedule or they just don't trust it. They think that we're kids on bikes and they don't take us seriously. So I would say it's more of a deterrent, for sure.

Horangic: How would you say your business model has spread? For example is it word of mouth?

Conder: The legal community here is small. I mean, we basically just knock on doors. Initially that was how we got our clients. They would see us bringing them documents from other law firms or from other court reporters or other businesses, and that's how they would see us everywhere, but we knocked on a ton of doors. We are everywhere all the time, so we know everybody. Because Reno's such a small town, anyone in the business community that's downtown or even not downtown we know, just because we're on the street constantly. So, word of mouth and just acknowledgement, seeing us around town and knocking on doors all the time.

Horangic: And how do people recognize you on the street?

Conder: We have our business on our back, so our bags and our logos. Our logo and name is on our courier bags. So that's how. We have jerseys, but we don't wear them very often. [laughs]

Horangic: That's the green and white stripe?

Conder: Yeah, or green and black now. I think that people now, especially for Chad and I, just know who Chad and I are from seeing us all the time. I think because Reno's such a small bike community, especially downtown and especially in certain areas that we go to, we're like the only five people that they see on bikes. [laughs]

Horangic: Really?

Conder: I would say so. I mean, not this time of year, but all through the winter and especially in certain areas of town. We're in Sparks a lot on Prater Way and no one ever rides their bike down there. If you're going to ride your bike over there, why wouldn't you take the bike path or Victorian? But we are, in that area.

Horangic: What do you think about the Reno bike culture?

Conder: I would say it's small but blossoming. I think a lot of other towns draw on the commuter aspect of the bicycle, whereas Reno is definitely still in the recreational realm for cycling.

Horangic: Recreational?

Conder: Like riding for fitness, basically.

Horangic: Mountain biking?

Conder: Yeah, mountain biking, road racing, cross training, stuff like that. I think Reno has always been one of the best places for that because of the geography, but there are no bicycle commuters here, almost. Up at the university we see some, but downtown there are seven. [laughs]

Horangic: There's seven of you? [laughs]

Conder: Yeah, but as a whole I wouldn't say it's even recognized as a form of transportation by the city or police or even residents of our community. I think it's mostly looked at as a form of recreation, whereas in other cities that I've lived, it's people's form of transportation.

Horangic: Do you think that's going to transition over time?

Conder: I think that the city of Reno is somewhat doing what they can to ease that transition by creating bike paths and bike lanes and getting on board with bicycle advocacy, but I also feel like the general layout of Reno doesn't necessarily lend itself to bicycling. Business is super spread out here and far away from people's residences, which isn't necessarily a bad thing for cycling, but it is a deterrent to your average newcomer to bike riding. As opposed to riding three blocks to work, people are riding four miles. I think that will always make that hard here unless Reno does a rejuvenation of downtown where they push big business back into the city center.

Horangic: What is the business address of Bootleg?

Conder: 545 East Fourth Street.

Horangic: What is your business space like?

Conder: It's a 5,000-square-foot warehouse based next door to the Reno Bike Project. There's a roll-up door in front and a man-door to the side of that. If you walk through the man-door, there's a common area where we have lockers, a couch, chairs, a coffee table, and a wall bike rack with all of our bikes.

Then just beyond that is our dispatch or our main office, which we dispatch from. Behind that is our warehouse space, which all only takes up about 600 square feet. In the other 4,500 square feet of warehouse, we have a coffee roastery, Magpie Coffee Roasters, that will be open in the next couple of months for retail coffee sales. Then we also have seven artists who rent studio space from us and then a large woodshop and metal shop.

Horangic: What comes out of the wood and metal shop?

Conder: They're basically just my shops, but some of the artists are able to use them as well. If you pay to have a studio space there, those spaces are available to you as well.

The artists don't use them a lot, but some of them do.

Horangic: What did you guys have to do make the space to what it is now?

Conder: Everything.

Horangic: Everything?

Conder: Yeah, it was a large antique store before. Through the course of traveling and moving around and doing these different various art projects, I was a part of three spaces that did that, two in Oakland and one in New York, where people moved into warehouse space, lived there, worked out of it and were able to turn it into a self-sustaining workshop and living space for themselves. I had always had the idea that it would be a really great thing in Reno.

Originally I thought that because the projects that I was working on for Burning Man were all happening in the Bay Area, that 40 to 50 percent of the grant money would go to transportation to get the pieces from San Francisco or Oakland to the Playa. I always thought that it was crazy that people wouldn't try to save a ton or half of their grant by working and living in Reno while they were doing the build. It's cheaper to live here and it's super comfortable for artists, because it's a small town. We just saw all that with the temple build. The food's cheap, people are nice, they can drink a lot and the Playa's right there. BRAF grants through Burning Man will no longer pay for transportation and I just always thought that why wouldn't you do it in Reno where transportation is not an issue. So I had this idea of bringing a warehouse like that to Reno for the past ten years, but didn't live here and it was in the back of my mind. I don't drink alcohol but I do drink a ton of coffee because my mom managed a coffee shop when I was a kid, which helped the idea evolve to having a coffee space and workshops in the warehouse space. I had started the business plan years ago, but I didn't finish it until I moved back to Reno and just put it in a drawer and sat on it, always open to the idea of finding a space, but not really looking for one.

I had always thought the building next door to the Bike Project was awesome. I really like East Fourth Street—one, because of its history; two, because I feel comfortable there with that demographic of people; and three, the vibe in the neighborhood is one I've lived in my whole life, so I like it. I really liked the building, so when the building came up for lease I went and looked at it. My girlfriend and I had broken up, so I was leaving my house. I just thought, well, this is the perfect time for it. So we jumped on it and, to date we've done all the work in there.

Horangic: You and Chad Strand?

Conder: Me and Chad, yeah.

Horangic: So Bootleg Couriers originally didn't have that space?

Conder: No.

Horangic: When did you buy the warehouse?

Conder: We just rent, but we moved into it in September of last year. We'd like to buy it. The building is considered to be the same building as the Reno Bike Project, so the same landlord. If we purchased it, we'd purchase the buildings together, not with the Bike Project, but we would own both buildings.

Horangic: And you live in the space as well? It's your residence?

Conder: Yes. We are not supposed to. So that might have to be off record. [laughter]

Horangic: I don't think it'll be a problem.

Conder: Well, my landlord knows, but the City of Reno doesn't know. [laughter] It's zoned mixed-use, so it's not necessarily illegal. We have a kitchen and working restroom facilities, so it's not as bad as it could be. If it was zoned commercial it would be super illegal, but it's not necessarily. It's kind of one of those things that's on the fence a little bit. So, yeah, we live there.

Horangic: Are you guys producing anything that is going to Burning Man?

Conder: No, nothing's going to Burning Man. I had a huge falling-out with them. That was the original basis of the idea of a warehouse, that you could get national artists who were doing sculpture work for Burning Man to come to Reno and facilitate paying for your space for six months.

But I don't deal with Burning Man at all anymore. So now the space is definitely funded by Bootleg, first and foremost, the coffee shop, or the coffee roastery, and then subsidiary through the artists that rent the space. They pay a very small amount; we wanted to keep it super affordable for artists and really artist-friendly, and I think that we've been able to do that. They only pay a hundred bucks a month and have access to really nice shop equipment and a large shop if they want to do large-scale work. Their studios are cool and they have a kitchen area and stuff like that.

Horangic: Have all the studio spaces rented out at this point?

Conder: Yeah.

Horangic: That's great.

Conder: And then some. [laughs]

Horangic: Do you think other businesses in Reno had a Burning Man vision like you did or do you see that popping up in the more industrial part of Reno?

Conder: I don't think that anyone had a Burning Man vision like I did when I had it. I think that back then Burning Man was still—well people were like, what the hell is going

on out there? I hadn't spent a lot of time in Reno other than for the past three years. I didn't come and visit very much when I left. But when I left, there was nowhere to buy supplies for Burning Man. Nobody really catered to people coming to Burning Man. Peg's would do great the week after when people were leaving, but it wasn't like it is now where even Whole Foods sells Burning Man supply kits and playa gear. It wasn't like that at all when I left. Especially when I was going to Burning Man, it was still mostly people from the Bay Area coming and populating Burning Man. Now Reno has definitely gotten on board with that, which in some ways is really good. I think it's a great revenue generator for the community, but in other ways it's kind of corny and weird. [laughs]

Horangic: It changes the idea of what it was.

Conder: It definitely changes the vibe. The son of the guy who started Burning Man is a super close friend of mine. He's really amazing and his idea behind Burning Man I still believe, is one of those things—it's one of those ideas that's so great and so pure, and then over the years because they didn't just kill it, it has become something that's super lame.

It's kind of like South by Southwest. It used to be really great for unsigned artists, and now Snoop Dogg's performing in a giant Cheeto-distributing machine or a giant Dorito-vending machine. You know what I mean? Burning Man started out great and really pure of heart and rad. The guy who started it, this guy Larry Harvey, is cool. He's super cool. Then he surrounded himself with six people who he knew really well and was friends with and went into business with them. Like anything it changes people, especially when you start dealing with millions and millions of dollars.

He saw Burning Man turn into this monster and he was like, "Eh, I'm good." He still goes, but he doesn't have any say over what goes on—he's like one of six LLC members.

So, anyway, I don't know how we got off on that. I think that people did have that idea, because people started going to Burning Man, like Dave Aiazzi, who's going to probably listen to this since he's the RTC guy, and started getting invited to parties in Oakland where they saw warehouse spaces like NIMBY or American Steel, which are these very prominent spaces that our space is directly modeled after on a much smaller scale. They started seeing these things and saying, "Oh, this totally works. Someone should be doing this in Reno," and they've sprouted up around here. Or at least people have tried to start them up, for example the Salvagery and Spencer Hobson who was able to get the Temple Build to his space on Hobson Square. So they've happened, but they're not really sustainable, especially with Burning Man where it is now, as such a big business.

They'll probably get that Temple Build again in his big space, but you know a lot of those places, like Salvagery's closed. There was another spot, I can't even remember what it was called, but there was another Burning Man-esque workshop space on Kuenzli or East Second Street, but that one closed, too. I think people definitely saw the potential and jumped on it, but didn't really have a model that they knew was going to work for that and thought that Burning Man would carry them through, and I just don't think Burning Man's in that place anymore. Ten years ago you could have done that and ridden

those coattails until now, but now doing that is over. For the BRAF, that incentive is totally gone. So what is the incentive of being in Reno when you could be in Oakland doing it in a bigger city that maybe you're from or has a larger pool of skilled labor or whatever it is? The cool factor. I don't know.

Horangic: What would you say your day-to-day operations at Bootleg are like?

Conder: We start at 7:30. We have a large medical billing client that we take care of early in the morning. I pick up from all the hospitals in town. Then it's busy. I mean, we're 7:30 to 5:30 steady, working the entire time.

Horangic: And that's riding from business to business, delivering things?

Conder: Yeah, totally. We have one person who drives. We take turns, because we go back and forth to Carson and Minden and Tahoe and Yerington, all over the place. So somebody's basically driving all day, also.

Horangic: What type of bike do you ride?

Conder: I have a few different bikes, but for work I mostly ride this Kelly single-speed that I have.

Horangic: Could you describe a single-speed?

Conder: Yeah, it's like a free-wheel but only one gear with brakes.

Horangic: A lot of messenger companies don't let you ride those in other places, correct?

Conder: They'll let you ride those. Some won't let you ride track bikes. This one's a free-wheel, so you can coast and it has brakes. There are laws against track bikes. I think even in Reno there is. I think the rule for a qualified bike is you have to have brakes on your bike, but a qualified brake is that you can make a two-inch skid with your back wheel or something, which is super weird.

Horangic: That's funny.

Conder: Some police in Reno will tell you that track bikes are illegal here and some won't. In other cities, I've never run into that, but I think that's the case in Seattle. Chad was telling me you have to have a front brake on a track bike. But I mostly just ride my Kelly. I like it.

Horangic: Did you have any impressions of East Fourth Street prior to moving your business there?

Conder: When I lived here originally, one of the coolest clubs or punk venues for underage kids was called the Blue Lamp, and it was over there. So that was my first

impression. I loved that. I liked that place a lot. They had some really great shows that were some of my fondest memories in Reno at that age. So there was that, and when I lived in other cities, I always lived in the industrial area. We are right across from Martin Iron Works. Our front windows look at Martin Iron Works and their yard. So I like it.

Horangic: The Reno Bike Project was already there prior to you guys?

Conder: To us moving in? Yeah, totally.

Horangic: Was that an influence as well?

Conder: Yeah, they're super close friends of ours. We would have moved in anyway, but it's nice to be next door to them. We joke about it, but we would love to take over that whole block of businesses. The thrift store is cool, we don't know the owner and there's Club Bass, which sucks. The owners are assholes.

But the Underground owner is really awesome. His name is Remi. He's great, he's hilarious, he's French. He's trying to sell the idea to the City of Reno to designate East Fourth as the red-light district of Reno, which is my favorite. It's just so damn funny and because he's French, to him that seems totally legitimate. But it's such a tough sell to all these old white guys in Reno. I just imagine him telling them that and it just makes me feel happy. [laughter] He's hilarious, too.

Horangic: So moving there had a lot more to do with the vibe of the street versus just the affordability of the street?

Conder: I would say the affordability is number one, for sure. I mean, everything over there is 40 cents a square foot right now. So it's the most affordable place to own or run a business in Reno. You can definitely get stuff for 10 cents a square foot in Sparks, but for Reno it's cheap, super cheap. Its proximity to downtown for us was really, really important for our company. So it's in a perfect area for Bootleg, the affordability is great, and then we just like it. I would say it's probably third, actually, on that list, but we do like the vibe, for sure.

Horangic: What is Bootleg's relationship with other businesses other than the few you've mentioned?

Conder: I'm on the Board of Directors for the Holland Project and my involvement with them is enormous.

Horangic: Could you describe what the Holland Project is?

Conder: It's an all-ages art, music, and activism initiative. We just recently moved into a little warehouse space on Vesta Street, which is down in midtown. That space houses a gallery, a show space for music shows, a library, and also a workshop space, which is mostly a city-funded workshop series for children, young adults, adults, or whomever wants to sign-up or come.

Horangic: And how does that relate back to Bootleg?

Conder: We initially had an office space on Cheney Street, and Holland Project was right next door to us. We were on one side and they were on the other. So that's how. [laughs] Just that proximity, plus Chad was super good friends with them and they're all our age and doing similar social things, I guess you could say, in town, and I took a liking to them.

I was pretty troubled as a teenager and didn't have any outlets like that, especially in Reno. I felt like there was a huge void for that age group, especially as a twenty-four-hour town with gambling and tons of bars. So it struck me as a really great thing and I still believe in it and still think it is a great thing. I'm the treasurer on the Board of Directors and in the past year, we got this new space and I'm doing the whole build-out on it.

Horangic: Oh, wow.

Conder: It's gone great and we're getting tons of national acts and nationally recognized artists in the gallery, and it looks amazing. We were able to reach our \$50,000 fundraising goal and then surpass it by 20-grand.

Horangic: What do you think about the homeless shelter?

Conder: I love it. [laughs]

Horangic: Why?

Conder: I don't mind it at all. I think it's crazy that it bothers people. In any other city in the country, there's always a homeless shelter—that proximity doesn't bother me whatsoever. There was a period in my life when I was homeless, so I can totally relate to that sort of demographic. I don't mind it whatsoever. Those people don't bother me. I don't think it increases crime on a serious level. Obviously, petty crime, for sure, but I think that that's more of a testament to social services in Reno for the mentally ill or people who are suffering from poverty than it can be attributed to having a homeless shelter. That is the only social service and it's a private enterprise, so I love seeing it. I think it's rad. I volunteer there once a month.

Horangic: What do you do when you volunteer at the homeless shelter?

Conder: I help in the kitchen. I just started. It's me and Britt Curtis, who's the Executive Director of the Holland Project, who are starting to volunteer over there. We just serve food. It's cool.

Horangic: What's the process to become a volunteer there?

Conder: They have a volunteer coordinator and you just talk to him, and then they do a

small orientation and then see where you want to be in the place.

Horangic: Do you think the homeless shelter has affected other businesses in the corridor in a negative or positive way?

Conder: It increases litter and there's definitely people sleeping behind businesses. That may be because of the train tracks, though. There's a reason that homeless shelters are built next to train tracks, because people are hopping trains to travel around if they're homeless and they want to travel. That's a huge part of the demographic. Maybe not so much nowadays, but it's still a huge demographic. It's the reason that homeless shelters are always so close to train tracks.

Horangic: You think that's thought of by developers?

Conder: Totally. Totally. [laughs] I know it is. It's city to city to city and usually in smaller towns, as well. In bigger cities, not always, but in smaller towns, always. For example, The Salvation Army build their shelters within close proximity to train tracks for that sole reason.

Horangic: You don't think it just has to do with the fact that it's an industrial area?

Conder: I think that could definitely be a part of it, but I've traveled around this country a lot by train. It's everywhere. [laughs] I really think there's a reason for that. There are probably a few different reasons, but I think they definitely think about that. You wouldn't build a homeless shelter in Spanish Springs—where is your community? If they're traveling, they're next to the train tracks, which 25 percent of homeless people are definitely traveling. So I think that it is thought of. I don't think it's a necessity or mandatory when they're looking for land, but I think it's definitely thought of.

Horangic: What's your understanding of East Fourth Street's history?

Conder: I know it was the old Lincoln Highway. I know that it's got a lot of railroad history. Forever Yours furniture is either a state or national landmark by the railroad, as is 325 East Fourth, which is right across the street from Lincoln Lounge. Those two are both landmark buildings for the railroad. But that's pretty much all I know about it.

Horangic: Have you seen any significant changes in the corridor since you've been there?

Conder: Not since we've been there, I haven't. I mean, it's only been six or eight months.

Horangic: Or even just since you've been associated with Reno.

Conder: Definitely from about 2000 to now, there's been a huge change. It used to be a lot, a lot seedier. I think for me, the beginning of that change was probably the Lincoln Lounge.

Horangic: In what way?

Conder: They took that building and converted it from a nearly Section Eight homeless crack motel to a nice bar and lofts. I sat on the board for Holland with one of the owners of Lincoln Lounge and Granite Street and that was their whole idea, to not gentrify but rejuvenate different areas around town and make a bunch of money doing it. I think it probably started with them and the baseball stadium. That baseball stadium is a crazy draw for that area and now the bus depot is great.

But as you move further east towards us, I think that there are a lot of businesses that you could handpick that would not have been there a few years ago. You know, Tutto Ferro, which is steelsmith Paolo Cividino. The Bike Project is amazing for that area. I think our space, when it's fully realized, will be really great.

I think it's happening all over town, but I think that in midtown and on East Fourth it's happening on a larger scale, East Fourth less so than midtown, but I think that could be directly attributed to how the street is laid out on East Fourth.

It's a busy street, you know. It's definitely not as seedy as it used to be, and I think it all started right there on that corner of Lake and Fourth or Evans.

Horangic: Would you term it as a revitalization or gentrification?

Conder: I would say the city portion is definitely gentrification. But the privately owned business is rejuvenation, for sure. Our goal is not to gentrify Fourth Street. We like the homeless people, we like St. Vincent's, we like all of that. We don't want it to go anywhere, whereas I think the city would prefer that it either go somewhere else or feel more hidden.

Horangic: Do you think it's possible to really separate the two, to revitalize an area and not create gentrification through that process?

Conder: I totally think it is. I think when you create businesses where your target audience is both, like the Bike Project, for example. People pull up in Volvos and take out \$2,000 bikes to have their mechanics work on them there, and people bring in a bike that they got at the Salvation Army for them to fix their flat tire.

I think that, when you're serving both those demographics, that is when revitalization's totally in effect, whereas a homeless person is never going to go to an Aces game. [laughter] They're probably not going to come into our space and weld something, either, but I'll tell you what, they're more than welcome to hang out behind it. We don't care. We're all for it. In fact, I have a dump truck out there right now that's not working, and there are two homeless people living in it. [laughter] I just asked them not to go to the bathroom inside. I was like, "You guys do whatever you want. I don't care. But eventually it'll be running and then you'll have to find a new spot."

But I think it's possible. I think when the city gets involved, not on a personal level, they're influenced by the general idea of what it means to be homeless and what it means to have a large demographic of homeless people in an area. They look at those numbers and make decisions based on that, rather than asking, "Okay, what is our part in this and how can we make this community work together instead of just putting a Band-

aid on it or moving it?" We have no social services for homeless or addicted or mentally ill people in Reno whatsoever and those services are being filled by private enterprise. They get to fucking choose where they want to be, you know. So I think that if they were to look at their part in that it would be huge for Fourth Street, because Reno's a perfect place. I am totally on a tangent.

Horangic: That's all right.

Conder: Reno's a perfect place do a really progressive, fully encompassing social services program, because there's a lot of federal funding for it. There's a smaller community of those types of people here, so you could really track it. They're all in one area, basically, and there's a large population of addicted, mentally ill, and poverty-stricken families and singles in this area.

It would just be awesome. So much of that is going on around the country, but they have logistical nightmares that Reno just doesn't have. It would be really cool for Reno municipalities and Washoe County to be on the forefront of that and it would be super possible with the help of St. Vincent's and some of those motels down there, and I don't know, the hospitals, like Renown.

It's all right there, whereas in San Francisco, if you were being treated for addiction, you had to be bused out to Hunter's Pointe and then you had to come back downtown to your shelter. Then you had to go out to the Sunset for work and Job Corps. It was because it wasn't centrally located where you could have all these facilities be together, whereas East Fourth is that. Renown's there, St. Vincent's is right there, there's all those motels, there's all this land. It would be a really great thing for Reno to tackle instead of saying, "Oh, you can't sleep in a sleeping bag on Fourth Street, but you can on Fifth Street." That's their way of fixing it, which I think is crazy.

Horangic: What did you think about the Tent City on East Fourth?

Conder: I loved Tent City.

Horangic: Why?

Conder: Just because it was rad. It's just so funny to have a Tent City. It seems like the City of Reno bought up so many stupid buildings around town when the money was flowing, with the intention of creating city offices, or renting to create profit, to create revenue for the city, and now they're just eating it so hard. All those buildings over by Reno High are vacant. The city owns all that stuff.

It seems hilarious to me that they would allow people to set up a Tent City, even though it was run pretty well, instead of creating Section Eight housing for those people, Then to dismantle it, and not offer any solution to those people other than sleeping in my dump truck.

But I liked Tent City. It was cool to go down there sometimes and just hang out. [laughter] Weirdo people. There were some weird and funny people, so I thought it was cool. Plus, I just like the idea of a Tent City. It seems funny to me. [laughs]

Horangic: Being on East Fourth, do you see the bar scene and the homeless scene mixing? What do you think that's creating?

Conder: I don't think it really creates anything. I think the types of bars are changing. When Lincoln Lounge was The Fourth Street Jazz Club, it was a spot for homeless people to go score drugs and get high in the motel above the bar. But that not what's happening on Fourth anymore. Maybe further, when you get to Dilligas, that's still the deal, but as far as Lincoln Lounge and Louis' Basque Corner and even Abby's which is kind of on the fence, are totally separate, completely separate, which I think is fine. You know those bars don't facilitate the negative behavior of somebody who's an alcoholic or a drug addict like they used to. They just do their own thing. Their clientele is a completely different person.

So I think that's good. That doesn't bother me. It used to be that those bars were definitely serving homeless people. I don't think so much anymore. I'm only talking about Louis', Lincoln Lounge, and Underground. Probably Davidson's, Dilligas, and even Abby's, are kind of still doing that sort of thing. I don't know.

Horangic: Do you feel as though there's a sense of community in the corridor?

Conder: I think so. I do just because our best friends are the Reno Bike Project.

Horangic: You've created your own sense of community.

Conder: Yeah, totally. They have six or seven employees. We have five. There are thirteen people with keys to our warehouse who are in and out. Three of the artists who are in our warehouse work at the Reno Bike Project. One of them is our employee also, Casey. So it's definitely this cross-pollination of folks. So for us, it feels like it. And then Paolo's our good friend, who's the metalworker right across the street. He's a super good friend of ours. And then the Lincoln Lounge guys, the head bartenders there are really good friends of ours and they get their bikes fixed at the Bike Project. I was on the Board of Directors with one of the owners of Lincoln.

But we don't ever get together on Fourth Street, other than between our two spaces, which is something that Remi has tried to spearhead and hasn't worked. He created that weirdo E4 thing. So that hasn't happened. I have a feeling this summer it will, because we're going to do a housewarming party at our place and I do this Artown event.

Horangic: What's E4?

Conder: That's East Fourth Street's version of midtown. It's a Merchants Association. When Remi originally started it, he got all these businesses on board and then it was event-based. I'm trying to convince him to have all of these people on a list, in an email list and make it more activism-based—so show up to City Council meetings where they're talking about why the road diet hasn't happened on Fourth Street for the past eight years that they've been saying it would. Things like that, like "let's fix the street before we just start having a stupid bar crawl." [laughs] Remi's on board with that, he's

down with it. He's funny.

Horangic: Is there anything that's going on in East Fourth Street that you don't want to see change, that you think is unique and valuable?

Conder: That I think is good?

Horangic: Yes.

Conder: I think that the only way to get young, creative businesses, thinkers, or artists onto East Fourth Street is to keep property values low. If they go back up to what they were, you'll see all those things go away, for sure.

So, hopefully, those property values stay the same. That's nothing anyone can really predict or do anything about, but that would be the best thing for that street, other than some road construction.

Horangic: Do you think transportation issues play a big role in the health of the corridor?

Conder: The city has a priority list for East Fourth Street. RTC does a priority list for the City of Reno and County of Washoe that they pretty much follow to a tee. Basically what happens is the City of Reno says, "We have \$20 million this year for road construction. Can you give us a list and prices in a priority order of what should be done?" They do that every year, and every year East Fourth Street misses the mark. So certain City Council members keep saying, "Oh, this is going to happen, this is going to happen. You guys are right there."

Basically what they're proposing to do is exactly what they did on Wells, create a center divider partway down, a median little island, and then give it a road diet— make it two lanes as opposed to four, and create a bicycle lane and parking. I think that if they actually did that, it would completely change the game on Fourth Street, because you'd go from a thirty mile an hour strip where people drive forty-five because it's basically a freeway to a two-lane city street.

So currently it's a highway. It's four lanes and there are not very many stoplights. Once you get past Evans you can kind of just go for it to Sutro. I think that would completely change the game, just like it did on Wells. From when I lived here in 2000 to when I moved back in 2008, Wells became a completely different neighborhood, and I think it's 90 percent because of the construction that they did over there to change how that road works.

I think if they did that on Fourth Street, it would be awesome. That road is just not as busy as it used to be. There would never be a problem with a two-lane road over there. They've already discussed that. It just basically comes down to funding and priorities. So I think you'll see in the next five years.

Horangic: What are the transportation safety issues that you see present?

Conder: Cycling down Fourth Street is ridiculous.

Horangic: Why?

Conder: Because the car lanes are four feet wide. There's not a bike lane, the curb is actually out of code. It's a twelve-inch curb and curb code is six-inch curbs or eight inches max now. So the whole street is out of code.

But the city is able to say, "Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's out of code but we have a plan to fix it." Plus who's going to say anything? They could get sued if someone falls off that curb. It's dangerous to ride a bike down that street, super dangerous. Other than that, I don't see any transportation issues.

Horangic: Do you think there are pedestrian issues?

Conder: No.

Horangic: Sidewalks are big enough, and things of that sort?

Conder: Yeah.

Horangic: What about parking?

Conder: Like I said, if you park on the street there's supposedly enough room, but we've lost two rearview mirrors and side mirrors on our car. It's just small and people are going fast and it's dark there at night.

Horangic: Do you guys have parking at Bootleg?

Conder: No. We park on the street. Sometimes we park in our driveway. But it's sort of illegal to park there because you block the sidewalk. There's a back alley, but it actually belongs to S&S Metal. But I park my dump truck back there.

Horangic: And it's now a house. [laughs]

Conder: Yeah, it's now a house. So we park on the street because we feel like it's safer.

Horangic: What's the biggest thing that you would like to see done on Fourth Street?

Conder: That road construction.

Horangic: Just the road construction?

Conder: Yes. I feel like that is a game-changer over there. I feel like property values will go up then; it's a total game-changer for that street. Right now it's almost impossible to have retail on East Fourth because of the condition of that road.

So I think it'll be huge. I think everyone over there agrees with me as well, so we'll see what happens.

Horangic: I hear you have aspirations to be the mayor of Reno. [laughter]

Conder: Is that what Casey [Clark] told you?

Horangic: A variety of people have told me that. [laughter]

Conder: I keep on saying that, but now I think I'm going to move. I keep on saying that. I love [Reno mayor] Bob Cashell as a person. He is hilarious. He gives money to the Holland Project, and he's just a cool guy. But as far as politically, he's a good old boy—not awful, but just older and out of touch, giving money to outside investors because they make lofty promises.

I think that Reno's funny that way, it never ceases to amaze me that they continue to subsidize outside commercial ventures downtown—for example, those stupid condos on Sierra. The Belvedere. They're completely bankrupt and vacant. There are only four units filled or something, and then ten years later they give the guy another million dollars in tax breaks and subsidies to do the stupid Comm Row. It's the same guy. Now that place is completely dead and desolate, and you've taken a Reno landmark and destroyed it. Who's going to come in and pay ten million dollars to tear down that fucking rock wall? [laughs] Nobody.

It's just like the Lear Theater. Granted, it was a privately done deal, but through the city. So the Lear Theater created a board, the Lear Board or whatever. They borrowed all this money from the state, but because they took it from the state and because Lear is a registered historical building, there are only certain things you can do with the building. But because the building is in such disrepair they never really thought it through and realized what the Historical Register said they could do with the building, but we can't do it for the amount of money that we're asking for.

We actually need three times that amount to get it back in order, because it's in a flood plain and it flooded like crazy, and blah, blah, blah. So they ask for all this money from the state, the state gave it to them, and then realized, oh, shit, we can't do what we want to do with it. Bob Cashell gave them twenty grand out of his pocket and the director of the board took a bunch of money, spent it unwisely, because there were no checks on any city funding. They were never like, "We're going to give you twelve million dollars but could we see some plans or a plan of action and some dates, and, you know, have our city planners revise it." They don't do any of that.

So instead, they just lose twelve million dollars and the Lear is sitting there empty with forty million dollars in state and federal liens, because they never fulfilled these grants. So anyone who comes into the Lear has to, off the bat, pay the liens.

They tried to shop it to the House of Blues, but the House of Blues said, "We have ten million. We're willing to pay ten million for it, but we're not going to pay thirty, it's worth ten, because you have these liens." So instead now the city just gave it to Artown, which is cool, I guess. So they'll do something with a cool building. But shit like that seems crazy to me. I think City of Reno's been running like that for a long time, you know?

Aces Stadium gets subsidies still. That's great but in a lot of other places, mostly in California, when large outside developers come into a neighborhood and develop a neighborhood, it's required of them to put X amount of dollars into a fund that goes to

build city parks.

We don't do that here. We give them money to build what they want to build and they don't have to give back shit, and when they leave there's nothing to hold them accountable for the subsidies or the money that they borrowed against the City of Reno or the taxpayers of Reno. It's crazy, I don't know why, but it continually happens. Meanwhile it's the hardest thing ever to be a local business here. For example the Carters own Ace Hardware, Bernie and Tim Carter. They're kind of crazy, right-wing dudes, but I really get along well with Tim. They're redeveloping basically all of midtown. Bernie bought it up like crazy and they're developing it. They run into so many roadblocks with the city and they started doing something that was really smart, I thought. Every time they go to the city, they write down the date, the time, who they spoke with, first name and last name, and exactly what happened, because they were running into so many times where they talked to one person who said one thing and then someone else said something else.

Then they take their notes and they have lunch with Bob Cashell, and they say, "Hey, one of your city planners told me it was cool to put the septic tank twenty feet off of the main throughway, and when we did that, the inspector came down and told us we had to stop and move it five hundred yards off." I don't know if this is the reason, but the whole city planning office just got fired two months ago, like cleared out. [laughs]

Horangic: I guess you're saying it's easy for big business in Reno.

Conder: Right, it's super easy for big business. They just push it through, you know. But, I think the Holland Project ran into the same thing where they gave them a building and took it away, and blamed it on all these crazy code compliance things. So, we'll see. I do think Aces Stadium is great, but it seems like there are so many other things, too, that deserve an equal amount of attention.

Horangic: You had mentioned that you think you're moving away from Reno. What does that mean for Bootleg?

Conder: We had always started Bootleg with the intention of selling it. Chad went to school to be a physical therapist. I have aspirations to do other things. It was a means to an end for us a little bit. I think that barring any unforeseen things in the next five years, we would probably sell Bootleg, on one contingency, that whoever operates it, operates it the same way so that bicycles are still used. We never set out to have it be our lifetime career.

We're on the way to the place that we really wanted it to be at, as far as how much money it makes and its influence on the community and now the space. We're probably halfway there. Once we get the other the rest of the way, I'm sure that we'll look at parting ways with it. That was always the intention of Chad and I. Not Doug so much, but Chad and I for sure.

Horangic: Is there anything that you want to add to wrap it up?

Conder: Said my piece. [laughter]

Horangic: Great. I appreciate it.