

Happy Trails

Jay Hoeschler designs and builds trails for hiking and biking.

Written by **Nancy Sokoler Steiner** | Photographed by **Micheal Neveux**

Jay Hoeschler worked as a creative director for advertising agencies for 25 years, specializing in marketing for large real estate developers. When a client wanted to build a golf course, Hoeschler suggested the funds might be better used for other outdoor amenities. Market research indicated a desire for hiking and biking trails, and the client agreed with that idea.

But when Hoeschler and his marketing partner, Justin Lax, tried to find a company specializing in trail design, they came up empty. Lax eventually found the man who built most of the trails in Park City, Utah. Although he was no longer doing that work, he agreed to mentor Hoeschler and Lax. The pair soon decided to create their own company.

That was 2013. Today their business, Avid Trails, employs 15 people and has planned, designed and built trails for public and private clients around the country. In Bountiful, Utah, the firm built more than 19 miles of the Bonneville Shoreline Trail for hiking and biking. In Big Sky, Montana, Avid Trails created a master plan for summer and winter trails. And when the developers of the Bay Creek community in Cape Charles, Virginia, chose to convert nine holes of golf back into a nature preserve, they turned to Avid Trails to create a network of trails providing access to the shoreline.

The best thing about his job, Hoeschler says, is creating spaces that draw people outdoors. “It’s good on so many levels. It’s good for health, and it’s good to get people into

nature. That’s really fulfilling to me.”

Around seven years ago, the firm began receiving requests for mountain bike parks. They recently completed the design for a 300-acre mountain bike park for the city of Santa Clarita.

“It’s this big bowl that’s surrounded by a mountain ridge, and we have a central gathering/picnic area at the bottom along with a couple of asphalt pump tracks and jump lines [trails for jumping bikes],” he says. “A trail goes up around the top of the ridge, and mountain bike trails come down that ridge—like at a ski resort. It’s going to be a gem here in California.” He estimates construction will begin in 2024 and finish in 2026.

Pump tracks combine rollers and berms, allowing bike riders to use their body weight and momentum to pump and propel themselves without pedaling. “No matter your ability on a bike, you can ride a pump track,” Hoeschler says. An avid hiker and mountain biker, he also joins those who skateboard on pump tracks.

Hoeschler serves on the El Segundo Planning Commission, which reviews land use issues for the city. The commission is currently examining pedestrian accessibility in Smoky Hollow, the historic business zone that is being reimaged and rezoned.


“It’s really important to me to get kids to walk and ride their bikes to school and have people walk to restaurants if they can instead of driving,” says Hoeschler, who similarly encourages Avid Trails’ clients to retain open spaces and create access to nearby destinations.

He has been involved with Tour de Pier, which raises funds for pancreatic and brain cancers, since its founding in 2013. The event places stationary bikes on the Manhattan Beach Pier for a day in May, and participants sign up for riding-in-place sessions led by South Bay instructors, entertainers and celebrity guests to raise funds for various organizations—more than \$13.3 million to date. Hoeschler rides each year and has provided graphic design and advertising for the event.

His leap from advertising to trail design has aligned his passion with his work. He says, “It’s the coolest thing I’ve ever done.” •

Haskell Bike Park Core Enlargement Plan



A man with glasses and a plaid shirt stands in a forest, leaning on a black mountain bike. He is smiling and has his left hand on his hip. The background shows large trees and a grassy area. The ground is covered with dry pine needles and a few pine cones.

Jay Hoeschler is a founding partner of Avid Trails, a nationwide trail-building firm, and heads up a team of environmental, GIS, landscape and graphic designers who thoughtfully consider every aspect of the trail experience. Below left is an overview of plans for the bike park for the city of Santa Clarita, which will include 300 acres of trails and tracks.