

At Home With ... Bend Research's Rod Ray

By [Penny Nakamura](#) / For The Bulletin

Published: March 02, 2010 4:00AM PST

In this monthly feature, we visit with well-known Central Oregonians and get a glimpse into their lives at home.

*Ian Ray assembles one of his many LEGO Star Wars sets in his room. For his most recent birthday, Ian visited LEGO LAND in Southern California with his family.
Photos by Ryan Brennecke / The Bulletin*

Rod Ray, president and chief executive officer of Bend Research, is a self-made man who doesn't rely on luck.

Wearing a baseball hat with his ranch's branding mark, blue jeans and some well-worn cowboy boots, Ray seems more of a tough cowboy than a man who holds a doctorate in chemical engineering from the University of Colorado and leads a growing pharmaceutical company.

"Keeping them guessing," the Bend native says.

"I started working at Bend Research when I was still in high school," recalls Ray in his comfortable east Bend ranch home. "I was just digging ditches and building fences back then in 1975, when there were only four employees."

Going from digging ditches and building fences to becoming president and CEO of Bend Research was something Ray, 53, says he couldn't have imagined when he was attending Bend High School.

"I'd have to say, I had this one high school physics teacher, John Barton, who was also our ski team coach, and he really influenced me and said to me that I was going to college," said Ray. "Back then, Bend was really a blue-collar town. It was a great place. It didn't have all these economic layers we have now. Everyone had the same kind of house. But it was a different place than it is now. Not everyone went to college."



Bend Research has since grown, and Ray says it now has 160 employees. He predicts more growth is coming for his company.

“We're working on some exciting drugs for Alzheimer's, cancer and diabetes,” said Ray. “Since our partnership ended with Pfizer, we have found we have more freedom, and we can expand our impact.”

At his sprawling Bend ranch, the warm home with a roaring fireplace welcomes visitors on a cold, rainy day, and Ray seems most comfortable and proud when introducing his family, which includes his wife, Lori, 40, daughter Mary, 20, and son Ian, 10. Ray is tickled when his 16-month-old granddaughter Bailie giggles and smiles.

As a family man, Ray can't help but beam when he talks about Mary, Bailie's mother.

“She's enrolled in the nursing program at (Central Oregon Community College),” explains Ray. “My mother (Nancy Zahl) was a nurse who worked in the Health Science Department there, and helped write the nursing curriculum for the students that they still use today.”

Ray's son Ian is inquisitive and full of knowledge, just like his father, and doesn't shy away from any question. Knowing a lot of the family history, Ian is keen to be interviewed.

“When I get to middle school, we're going to home school, and go on these exploring trips and see the Seven Wonders of the World,” explains an animated Ian.

Ray interjects he would like to follow the Lewis and Clark Trail with his son.

Learning by doing is the dictum Ray has followed, and so far it has served him well.

“I find if you buy the tools, you learn to fix it, and you get better at it,” said Ray, laughing. “I wanted to build a Western town for my kids in the backyard — so I did. It's based on Thunder Mountain at Disneyland.”

The only building he didn't construct in this miniature Western town was the new chapel, which he wanted done professionally as a 40th birthday gift to his wife.

“It's designed after a church in ... Canyon City — St. Thomas Episcopal Church,” Ray said.

Lori Ray says she was overwhelmed by the gift, and loves to go in the small chapel and have a private place to reflect and meditate.

“I feel blessed to be in this community, working in a science company that's in an amazingly beautiful place,” said Lori, who's also an engineer and a vice president at Bend Research.

As a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Lori says she's been fortunate to work in a science field that had been dominated by men. "I stand on the shoulders of all the women who came before me and proved everything is possible."

When the Rays aren't working and relaxing in Bend, they fly to their cattle ranch in John Day. Ray decided one day he was going to learn to fly, and now he's a pilot.

As for the cattle, he didn't grow up on a ranch, but had to learn by doing.

His next dream? Doubling the size of Bend Research and sailing the globe.

Ray recently answered some questions about his home life, cooking, gardening and more.

How long have you lived in Central Oregon? I've lived here 44 years, Lori has lived here 16 years. We've been in this house for 15 years.

What I loved about my home is ... The setting and the view. The weather is much better on the east side of town, and our view of the Cascades awakens the soul.

My favorite room is ... The great room. Its open design draws the family together — whatever everyone is doing.

My favorite possession is ... Our ranch in John Day. It is a place to retreat and recharge in an isolated mountain environment.

If I had a Monday off to do anything I wanted to do at home, alone, I'd ... I'd build something with my son Ian. Lori would meditate in the church I had built for her.

Three things you'll always find in our refrigerator are ... Mirror Pond Pale Ale, Redhook ESB and Coors!

Are you handy around the house? Me and Ian, yes. Lori, not so much.

Have you had a favorite home improvement project or do-it-yourself adventure? The miniature Western town we built in the backyard for the kids to play in. The saloon doubles as a sauna.

My favorite piece of artwork in the house is ... Our Charlie Russell paintings and pictures of the kids. The Charlie Russell paintings I inherited from my mom, who had them hanging in our house when I was growing up. The photos of the kids include Mary ski racing around a (giant slalom) gate, and a photo of Ian with a fire torch when we were learning to make a fire line around the ranch.

My life would be simpler if ... I was less type-A, Lori was less introverted, Ian was less exacting, and Mary was more organized and if Bailie slept.

Gardening is ... challenging in Central Oregon.

Do you like to cook, and if so, what do you cook? Yes, I like to cook chili. Lori likes to cook/bake anything with chocolate.

Do you eat out often? If so, where do you like to go? For dates, The Loft and Zydeco. The service is outstanding, and we always run into interesting Bend folk. With the family, Double Happiness and Yoko's.

What's your idea of the perfect get-together at home? Cocktail hour on the deck or by the fireplace. We also have a fire pit near the Western town, and it's always fun to have chairs around the campfire with friends.

What do you usually have for breakfast? Everyone has their own routine. I like to have a banana and a granola bar. Lori likes an egg, one slice of bacon and cranberry juice.

If you could have a second home anywhere in the world, where would it be? We love our ranch in the Strawberry Mountains. We would like to also have a sailboat in the San Juan's.

What do you do when you have time to relax and recreate in Central Oregon? Ski, sail, bike, camp, kayak, explore new places and work on the ranches.

Favorite rock bands or singers? Kenny Chesney, Jethro Tull and Tom Petty. Does that date me?

Words I live by are ... "Living the dream."

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