



**TWO RIVERS
CONSULTING
MAKES FREMONT
COUNTY AND
EMERGENT HOME**

Personal tragedy often shapes not only who we are as individuals but as professionals. That is certainly true in the case of Kevin Mahmalji. His sister tragically passed away from Crohn's disease after a misdiagnosis and inability to access quality healthcare. She was 19 and a college student but unable to afford healthcare insurance.

Creating Change from the Grassroots

Inspired to make a difference by seeking healthcare reform to ensure that others didn't fall to the same fate as his sister, Kevin began to build a grassroots network in support of President Obama's campaign and push for affordable coverage of those with preexisting conditions and young adults until they reached the age of 26. "I watched President Obama on the evening news as he talked about the need for healthcare changes and affordable coverage and was immediately sold," he recalls. This decision wasn't made lightly, as Kevin encountered significant resistance from friends and neighbors. "Sadly, I was told that I was no longer welcome to visit the homes of some of my friends," he says.

Living in the rural community of Uvalde, which is situated almost directly between San Antonio and Del Rio, Texas, organized political channels simply didn't exist. Not to be thwarted, Kevin started his own grassroots undertaking—handing out flyers and hosting meetings about the Texas "Two-Step" caucus. Two representatives from President Obama's campaign who just so happened to be attending one of his meetings while on their way to another campaign event in a neighboring county were immediately sold on Kevin. "They came up to me after the meeting was wrapped up and asked me if I wanted a paid job," he says. "She told me that I had seven days to get up to Madison, Wisconsin." And with that somewhat chance meeting, Kevin's political consulting career was born.



Building a Future in Colorado

Kevin came to Colorado back in 2009 when he was recruited to work on Michael Bennet's successful run for the U.S. Senate. He subsequently worked for a series of nonprofit initiatives developing strategic communications and plans for citizen lobbying engagement, facilitating and leading town hall meetings and round table discussions, and authoring numerous articles on various public policy initiatives. While still serving as the director of Outreach and Engagement for a national nonprofit organization with 160-plus affiliates around the country, Kevin decided to launch his own strategic consulting business—Two Rivers Consulting—in 2014. "I've evolved my areas of focus over the years and found that strategic communications aligns best with my core strengths and is something that both businesses and nonprofits need," he explains.

Over his years in strategic communications, Kevin has proven that he has a special knack at connecting with rural communities. "Going back to my time growing up in Uvalde, I have constantly heard and seen that rural communities are being left behind," he says. "Whether Texas, Wisconsin, Iowa, Virginia, or Colorado, rural populations often

find themselves on the 'short end of the stick.'" The foundation, as a result, was in place for Kevin to relocate to rural America from Denver. "I grew up in rural America and have spent the bulk of my career working with rural constituents," he adds.

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***Kevin Mahmalji, President and Strategic Consultant,
Two Rivers Consulting***



Landing in Rural Fremont County

The constant “wear” of working in Denver began to take its toll on Kevin. “Traffic congestion got significantly worse, and the commute to downtown became increasingly painful,” he says. “My rent was constantly going up. I didn’t have the discretionary funds to market Two Rivers Consulting, and found that I was treading water.”

Having previously spent time working in Fremont County, it was on Kevin's final list of targets. When a friend contacted him about a rental house in Cañon City in April 2018, he jumped at the opportunity. When the property was sold in late 2018, Kevin decided to move to Florence. Shortly before that happened, he authored an op-ed on the need for broadband in rural America and cited the work of the Fremont

Economic Development Corporation (FEDC) TechSTART as an example of progress in the space and a benchmark for other rural communities. “I didn’t have a relationship with TechSTART or anyone from the organization at that point, but I was aware of what they were doing.”

Joining Emergent Campus at Ground Zero

Kevin jumped head-first into his new community when he moved to Fremont County and has been highly involved in various organizations—serving as the vice president of the John C. Fremont Library District, president of Florence Rotary Club, board member for the Chamber of Commerce, and member of the

Steering Committee for the Heart of Colorado Rural Philanthropy days. “My involvement in these different organizations got my name around the community,” he says. Because of his involvement in those organizations, he was invited to attend the inaugural opening of the Emergent Campus.

Kevin was sold almost immediately. “I was in the initial stages of looking for an office space, but I simply didn’t have enough business to warrant the expenditure,” he says. “Emergent Campus was a perfect fit for me and where I was at with Two Rivers Consulting.” The chance to network and collaborate with other entrepreneurs and small businesses has been a huge plus, according to Kevin. “I cannot think of anything else like the Emergent Campus. I lived in Denver for 10 years, and there isn’t anything like it there.”

As a tenant of Emergent Campus, Two Rivers Consulting has a business listing, and Kevin can use the coworking space whenever he needs to do so. “Emergent Campus is like a one-stop shop for a small business owner or an entrepreneur,” Kevin says. “We take care of each other and work to ensure that our dreams come true. Whenever I need help with something or need to bounce something off of someone else, I can do so. I also have the flexibility to add more employees without taking on additional overhead.”



Kevin also foresees that he will leverage an intern through the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (PTECH) initiative. “It will be a great opportunity to mentor someone who is interested in strategic communications—whether for the private sector or public sector,” Kevin notes.

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Emergent Campus Facilitates Transition to Full Time

Late last year, Kevin resigned from his position as the director of outreach and engagement to focus on Two Rivers Consulting full time. “This was right before the pandemic hit, so it wasn’t ideal timing,” he relates. “Emergent Campus has been a real blessing. I’ve generated new business through the connections I’ve made and I’m actually busier now than when I was in Denver.” Plus, now that Kevin’s expenses are significantly lower, he can put more money back into the business. “Before I moved to Fremont County, I simply didn’t have the resources to invest in marketing my company,” he says. “That isn’t the case any longer.”

Since hanging his own shingle, Kevin has partnered with numerous clients on a wide range of projects. In addition to preparing press releases and writing company profiles for local businesses, Kevin authored an in-depth report that examines current practices, processes,

methodologies, and overall competencies of analytical testing laboratories in California, Oregon and Massachusetts. Most recently, Kevin was hired as the senior policy advisor for a Colorado-based company that’s focused on federal lobbying efforts.

While the majority of his work has been within the realm of strategic communications, Kevin continues to demonstrate why his versatility as a strategy consultant makes him a valuable asset to small businesses and nonprofits alike.

“It’s really exciting to be at the heart of a transformation in a rural community—and it would not be possible without initiatives like TechSTART and Emergent Campus, he added”

ABOUT *FEDC TECHSTART*

Fremont Economic Development Corporation is a 501(c)6 professional economic development organization focused directly on business attraction, retention and expansion in Fremont County, Colorado. With an established and growing network of business, academic and governmental partners, we directly assist companies with competitive location or expansion projects by connecting them with the right people, the appropriate resources and the most meaningful and relevant information. FEDC's TechSTART program is an award-winning tech sector co-working community, creating an innovation catalyst for rural Colorado.

FEDC TechSTART is a proud supporter of the Upper Arkansas Technology Sector Partnership, the second tech sector partnership in the state of Colorado.

