

The Telegraph

'Put Nashua on Bikes Day' takes baby step in larger mission



Richard Schwartz of Nashua and Adam Shrey of Hudson made repairs to an 18-speed Next bicycle, including its rear derailleur, while Max Joyal of Nashua, working behind them, repaired an 18-speed Royce Union bicycle, during the bike clinic. Photo by Darrell Halen

NASHUA – A used 18-speed Royce Union mountain bike got a new lease on life when Ed Lettich purchased it Saturday for just \$25. The Nashua man plans to ride it at local parks.

Lettich, 35, was one of several people who bought a refurbished and cleaned bicycle during “*Put Nashua on Bikes Day*,” an event one of its organizers described as a baby step to establishing a bicycle cooperative in the community.

“There are a number of people that have transportation issues, who just don’t have cars,” said John Burkitt, adding that having a bicycle can make the difference whether someone can travel to medical appointments, a job and stores. *“It gives them a lot of freedoms that they just don’t have if they don’t have a car.”*

Burkitt, a Hudson retiree and certified bike technician, leads “*Let’s Put People on Bikes*,” an effort to rescue and repair bikes – such as those outgrown by kids, thrown away at dumps or taking up space in garages – and donates them to local charitable agencies for people in need.

He is collaborating with several city groups, including St. Boniface Council of Knights of Columbus, Nashua Police Athletic League and Harbor Homes to “*put Nashua on bikes*.”

Saturday’s event, organized by the coalition and taking place in front of St. Patrick Center on Main Street, featured free basic bike tune-ups and previously used adults and kids bicycles for sale. Organizers also welcomed donations of bicycles, accessories and tools.

“We’ll evaluate this, clean it up and sell it,” said Burkitt after a man dropped off a Murray mountain bike, in good shape, that Burkitt estimated to be 20 to 25 years old.

Prior to the six-hour bike sale and clinic, organizers had refurbished approximately 20 bicycles. Halfway through the day, workers had sold 10 bicycles, with the highest-priced bike at \$50.

Lettich received a helmet and an ice cream sandwich when buying his bike, which came with a smiley face balloon attached.

He and his girlfriend, Christina Marino, were driving to a gym when they saw the event taking place and decided to stop. Buying the bike provides

Lettich with a healthy activity at an affordable price.

"This is something new we're trying to get into," she said.

Burkitt wants the bike co-op to be self-sufficient, train riders on how to maintain bikes and ride them safely, and offer people the opportunity to obtain bicycles by working for them through an earned-bike program.

Jesus Cortes-Rodriguez, 24, a city resident and one of the event's volunteers, said the bike co-op would play an important role in the community.

"There are a lot of people who do ride bikes in Nashua," said Cortes-Rodriguez, a bike rider who does not have a driver's license. "There are a lot of people who depend on bikes in Nashua. (This) will help them learn how to fix their own bikes. When ... they need to ride their bikes, they can just tune them up, fix them, get back on the road and ride."

Knights of Columbus Member Don Pare, another organizer, said the people the group intends to help by providing them with refurbished, safe bikes include veterans who can't drive and local organizations like Marguerite's Place, which provides transitional housing for homeless women with children.

"At least that way there they'll have a safe form of transportation," Pare said.

He said hopes organizers will be able, in the future, to provide bike-stabilizer wheels to

people who have balance problems, have suffered

a stroke, a head injury

or have neurological problems.

And he would like to help provide bike riding at high schools as an alternative to sports where athletes suffer concussions.

In addition to buyers like Lettich, the event drew others who drove by and saw the two large white banners, both reading “*Put Nashua on Bikes,*” in front of the center.

Calvin Martin, 13, stopped in with his father, hoping workers could repair his Next Chaos BMX bike, which had a snapped rear brake cable.

Burkitt wasn't sure they would be able to fix the bike.

Work done on other bicycles throughout the day included brake adjustments, adding new derailleurs, inflating tires and cleaning and lubricating chains. Many of the workers – all volunteers – were, like Burkitt, bike enthusiasts.

Richard Schwartz, a Nashua software engineer, repaired bikes with Adam Shrey, an electrical engineer from Hudson.

Mountain biking is a hobby of Shrey's and Schwartz rides to keep weight off and save money. Shrey serves as president of MakeIt Lab, a nonprofit in Nashua, where Burkitt hosted a similar bike event last winter.

One of the bikes they worked was a Huffy Sportsman, which was at least 42 years old. It featured a City-of-Manchester registration sticker from 1975.

The tires were old, the chain needed lubricant and there were rust spots on the rim, but the frame was in excellent condition.

“It's actually in very good shape considering its age,” Schwartz said.

Nearby, another volunteer, Max Joyal, repaired bikes, too, including an 18-speed Royce Union he had mounted on a repair stand.

“You do a few adjustments and it's like new,” Joyal said. “It doesn't take a lot to bring life back.”

Organizers said they share a commitment to safe transportation, taking care of the environment – including keeping old bikes out of landfills – and people having fun.

They were happy with the turnout of the event, which served as a pilot for their program, was supported by several donations and included complimentary grilled food.

Pare said several of the customers who purchased bikes are willing to volunteer their time for the cause.

"It looks like we succeeded in what we wanted to do," he said.

Burkitt said he plans to offer bike clinics from 9 a.m.-noon Aug. 12 at the Nashua Public Library and 4:30-6 p.m. on Aug. 20 at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Nashua.

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