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Building community, one spoke at a time

Community Cycling Center teaches skills to get folks going by bicycle

BY JENNIFER WILLIS

LocalNewsDaily.com Sep 10, 2006

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The Community Cycling Center is a Portland bike rider's dream – combining a passion for bicycles with true community service and sustainability.

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“The heart of our organization is providing bicycle safety education programs to the community,” says Alison Hill, director of development and communications at the CCC. “We’ve got a lot going on here.”

Opened on Northeast Alberta Street in 1994, the nonprofit Community Cycling Center operates a full-service used bike shop and recycling program, with proceeds going to support its many educational programs, serving mainly low-income youths and adults and promoting safe riding as a viable form of transportation.

Through earn-a-bike programs, participants learn bicycle safety and receive a bike, helmet and other gear. “Our programs help people become safer riders,” Hill says. “That’s what makes a healthy community.”

Qualifying adults are referred by social service agencies to the Create a Commuter program. CCC creates a bike specifically for each participant and



JONATHAN HOUSE / LOCALNEWSDAILY.COM
He recently completed mural at the Community Cycling Center on Northeast Alberta Street honors the nonprofit's mission to get as many people as possible on bikes.

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teaches basic maintenance and repair, route planning and how to take the bike on TriMet.



The new commuters “are really excited about the opportunity and the independence that it provides,” says Gabe Graff, CCC programs manager.



“The program is awesome. It changed my life,” wrote one Create a Commuter graduate on an anonymous comment card filled out at the end of the program. Another participant describes the program as “an opportunity to get back to a healthy and useful mode of living.”




The CCC offers two “earn-a-bike” programs for kids as well. In Get Linked, kids ages 5 to 12 take safety classes at CCC and get to keep the bikes they use at the end of the program.




“For the kids, it’s about how to find neighborhood destinations. Where’s the park that’s closest to their house? How do you look at a map? It’s helping kids figure out how to get safely from Point A to Point B,” Hill says.



With funding from the Oregon Department of Transportation and the Portland Children’s Investment Fund, the Bike Safety Clubs meet in area schools, where kids ages 6 to 12 learn bike-maintenance skills and safe-riding techniques. This earn-a-bike program has a greater than 85 percent completion rate.




“Kids learn from other kids,” Graff says. “The more kids see graduates of our program, the more that will become the norm, rather than riding a rusty old bike without a helmet on the sidewalk, which is where they’re more likely to get hurt.”




Annual events help to raise funds and awareness. Fun rides, including the Hottest Day of the Year Ride (held Aug. 6 this year) and the Worst Day of the Year Ride (mid-February), attract bicyclists from all over Portland, with as many as 1,500 people participating.



The biggest event is the Holiday Bike Drive, held in December at Legacy Emanuel Hospital and benefiting about 600 kids each year. “They get fitted for a helmet,” Hill says. “They choose a bicycle. We tune it up for them, and make sure it fits. And then they bring home their first bicycle.”

Repairs, sales make it possible

But CCC’s main source of funding is the bike shop, whose sales and repair services account for upward of 60 percent of the organization’s income. Volunteers help clean donated bikes, while professional mechanics refurbish them for sale.

Paid staff members help customers get properly fitted on bikes and assist in choosing the right accessories – from helmets and locks to lights and pumps. CCC Executive Director Susan Remmers estimates \$500,000 to \$600,000 in annual sales from the shop.

The mechanics are key to the shop’s success. “Our mechanics have to be really skilled in order to do this work of refurbishing a different bike every day. It’s a fairly complicated task,” Graff says.

“The bikes we build are very unique,” Remmers says. “They’ve been fully restored, and you can’t replicate that one bike. It’s been handled and developed by a professional mechanic.”

On any given day, customers can find a good selection of mountain and road bikes for adults and children.

Bike shop customers tend to be environmentally and socially conscious, and

passionate about bikes.

CCC's bikes carry a 90-day warranty – and prices are competitive, at \$300 to \$500 for most of the restored or refurbished adult bikes, but the real appeal behind CCC is that the bikes they sell are essentially one-of-a-kind, having been restored, assembled and checked by professional mechanics.

“We try to keep our bikes within reach, and balance that with the knowledge that there's tremendous value and quality and love that's been applied to that bike,” Remmers says.

“When a bicycle comes in, it represents the community support we have,” Graff says.

Community REcycling Center?

Donated bikes are assessed by professional mechanics. Quality models are reconditioned for sale or for CCC's earn-a-bike programs. Others are destined for recycling – bike parts are sent to Metro Metals or are converted into furniture by Resource Revival, and the tires are made into messenger bags by Alchemy Goods in Seattle.

“Portland is really fortunate, because we do have a nice, healthy, competitive environment in terms of used bikes,” Remmers says. “It's not all about 'new.' It's about trying to redirect and reuse and recover materials that are perfectly fine and ready to be used again.”

According to Hill, the Community Cycling Center started “with the vision of providing a place for the neighborhood to get access to a viable alternative transportation that's a comfortable, engaging, fun experience for the whole community. We're building a community that really values and enjoys bicycles. That's what we're here to do.”

Find out more

- Community Cycling Center

1700 N.E. Alberta St.,

503-288-8864,

www.communitycyclingcenter.org

Hours: noon to 7 p.m. Tuesday-

Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 pm.

Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday

- Alchemy Goods,

www.alchemygoods.com

- Resource Revival,

www.resourcerevival.com

- Metro Metals,

www.metrometalsnw.com

Vital stats

- Number of bicycles sold in the U.S. in 1997: 15.2 million
- Number of bicycles sold in the U.S. in 2005: 19.8 million
- Percentage of Americans who bike to work regularly: 1

- Percentage of Amsterdam and Copenhagen residents who bike to work regularly: 30

Sources: National Bicycle Dealers Association, Earth Policy Institute

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