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Adopt a Family Bikes Brings Joy to Local Families

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Adopt-a-Family organizer Tania Hanson-De Young remembers a day a few years ago when she went to deliver a refurbished bicycle to a needy girl in a low-income area of Concord.

The neighborhood kids saw the fancy car coming down the street and chased alongside it, shouting as they tried to guess who was getting the new bike.

"Where is it going? Who gets it?" the youngsters yelled.

The car stopped at a house and the volunteers got out and prepared to unload the bike.

Standing alone was a little wide-eyed girl draped in shabby second-hand clothing.

The bike was to be hers.

It was just a second-hand bike, probably not worth much money at all, but on that day the girl was a princess and her new bike was her white horse.

"All of the sudden everyone wanted to talk to her and ride her bike," said Hanson-De Young, a volunteer with the Adopt-Family bike drive program that was started by a handful of people from St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Danville six years ago.

Hanson-De Young tells another story of a homeless man who received a refurbished bike through a Walnut Creek homeless shelter. "He hugged me and said, 'Now I don't have to be on my feet all the time,'" she recalled.

Every year around this time a group of dads get together many weeknights and each weekend to clean, tune and refurbish bikes. They've been in a handful of locations since the program started. This year, they are in a donated storefront at the Rose Garden shopping center in Danville.

The storefront is filled with bikes in various states of disrepair. Some just need the chain lubed and the tires pumped up, while others need new brakes or a complete overhaul.

"It needs to be done," said David Struck, who started working on bikes as a teenager and worked his way through college in a bike store. "You don't want a bike going out that someone is not going to get any joy from."

Most bikes can be fixed and then sent on their way but there are a few that the guys call "Frankenbikes." Those bikes are salvaged for parts because they are too badly broken or rusted to go back on the road.

"We really try to throw away as little as possible. Spare parts go into the bone yard," said Struck.

Struck, now 51 and his friends Rand Mahoney and Joe Hui, at ages 55 and 46, are the three Danville fathers who are doing the cleaning, tuning and fixing up on the more than 200 bikes that have been donated this year. Sometimes others come to help, but mostly it's the three fathers, listening to rock and roll, tinkering on bikes, cracking jokes and working to make someone's holiday a bit brighter.

"For me, it's about giving back," said Hui. "I grew up real poor in foster homes and this is a way for me to give back."

The first year of the bike drive, volunteers fixed up about 50 bikes. The program has grown from there. Stuck said that after this year the group will have refurbished at least 1,000 bikes.

Bikes go to children at the Monument Crisis Center and the Salvation Army, both in Concord; Options Recovery Services in Oakland; Grant Elementary and Richmond High School in Richmond; and Fresh Start in Walnut Creek, volunteers said.

The program is supported by Danville Bike, which sells the group bike parts at cost; 1st Lighting Source in Auburn, which donated all the lights to the men for the current shop; and Pat Abshire, who loans his truck out for deliveries.

Bikes are collected at 730 Camino Ramon, Suite 140 – 160 in Danville. The shop is generally open from 6 to 9 p.m. on weekday evenings and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekends. For more information, go www.adoptfamilybikes.org.
- KB

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