

WRENCH, LEARN, AND EARN

BOULDER'S COMMUNITY CYCLES IS A MODEL RECYCLE-A-BIKE PROGRAM—AND SO MUCH MORE BY AVERY STONICH



A Santa's workshop of sorts is alive and well in Boulder, Colo., in a string of light-industrial work bays on the eastern edge of town. Visible from one of the city's famed bike paths, the shop's rolling garage doors open to reveal a treasure trove of all things bicycle. Welcome to Community Cycles—part bike shop, part community work space—where used bikes sprout like mushrooms after a summer rain, and anyone is welcome to feast on a bounty of hand-me-downs in search of new homes.

The shop has a funky, welcoming vibe, with bright orange and yellow walls, a ceiling festooned with frames and wheels, and a tool rack labeled with hand-scratched lettering. Lining one wall, color-coded used parts bins organize hubs and headsets, shifters and stems, bolts and brakes. The tinkling sound of tools at work fills the air, while cheerful volunteers act like elves, building bikes and offering friendly advice to wannabe wrenchers.

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Community Cycles is much more than a bike shop. Sure, they sell used bikes and parts, and offer guidance and classes on how to repair them. Yet this thriving nonprofit organization also takes it to the next level, making bicycling accessible to the broader population by offering Earn-a-Bike programs, coordinating community events like Walk and Bike Month, and working to create more and better places to ride.

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Community Cycles relies on donations to keep rolling. Fortunately, Boulder garages are overflowing with bikes. Cars pull up daily, loaded with cast-offs from racers to regular Joes and Janes who want to offload old rigs to upgrade to the latest and greatest.

"The donations we get are incredible," said Sales and Service Manager Dax Burgos. "You wouldn't believe the bikes that people drop off here."

Once refurbished, bikes sell for \$100 to \$800, with \$225 the average. Folks who lack the cash to buy a bike can pay with sweat equity through the Earn-a-Bike program, where participants build a bike from the frame up and roll away

with a sweet ride and wrenching skills to boot.

"The biggest impact we have on the Boulder bike community is what happens in the shop when the doors are open," said Community Cycles Board President Ray Keener. "It's an incredible resource for anyone who has questions, problems, or issues with their bicycle. The staff is experienced and patient and ready to help with anything that is going on with a bike."

Rob Fremgen has been volunteering at Community Cycles for five years. "A lot of people are scared at the prospect of working on their bike. They just need a little guidance," he said.

With hundreds of bike shops like this across the country, what really puts Community Cycles ahead of the pack is how the organization serves as the voice for bicyclists in Boulder. Executive Director Sue Prant has deep roots in the advocacy world, having been executive director of the Greater Philadelphia Bicycle Coalition, and Boulder's Walk and Bike Week Coordinator.

"The one thing that really serves everybody is advocacy," said Prant. "If you're out using a bike, you need advocacy to make sure there are good and safe places to do that."

One of Community Cycles' biggest victories was securing \$5.6 million in transportation funding. The organization's staff and volunteers lobbied to get the sales tax initiative on Boulder's 2013 ballot, and it passed with flying colors. Community Cycles is now working to make sure a substantial portion is used for bicycle facilities.

In addition, Community Cycles keeps an eye on development proposals and provides input to the city's transportation and planning departments in order to maximize infrastructure improvements for bicyclists. The organization also weighed in on the city's Transportation Master Plan.

"The people on our advocacy committee know more about this stuff than just about anyone," said Keener. "They look at everything that's going on and provide positive and constructive feedback."

While Community Cycles benefits from boundless good will and an engaged and helpful community, it's not all roses. The organization suffers from inevitable aches and pains. Boulder's status as a desirable place to live drives rents high, so finding affordable space is a challenge. Selling used bikes will never provide the key to a gilded kingdom. Fundraising is a constant challenge. Thankfully, fundraising events, member donations, and support from local businesses are keeping the lights on and shining bright. 

For more information, visit communitycycles.org. For tips on setting up a similar program in your town, contact Community Cycles Board President Ray Keener at ray@growthcycle.net.