
Advocacy Column

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New life for your old bikes

If you received a new bike for Christmas you may wonder how to dispose of your old one. Here's an idea. *Donate your old bike next spring to Recycle-A-Bike (RAB) in Providence.* The volunteers at RAB community bicycle workshop work to put more bikes in the hands of kids.

Created in 2001 by a small group of community minded, bicycle commuting activists in Providence, RAB has an interesting and productive mission: to collect and repair used bikes to give to any child or student who is willing to come to the workshop at The Steel Yard at 27 Sims Avenue to return a bike to useable condition.

Their original goal was to create a small bicycle-repair cooperative in Providence where they could share tools and workspace, and help each other fix their own bicycles. They also wanted to help make good working bikes available to other friends without bikes, and advocate for green transportation and living practices. With an initial donation of used bikes and new and used parts the group established the first workshop. Recycle-A-Bike was launched.

Over the years RAB has had many homes. First, the group took over an inactive youth "Earn-a-bike program" at Trinity Church on Broad St. in Providence that included more tools, and hundreds of used donated bikes. Recycle-A-Bike merged the small collective of cycling activists with the abandoned after-school bicycle repair workshop and continued to operate in the basement of the church. The volunteers wrote grants to fund bike education programs for neighborhood kids and buy new bike repair tools.

More and more people came to help, learn, and volunteer. The number of bikes reconditioned and distributed in good-as-new condition increased until the group was able to ship 50 bikes to Liberia while continuing to meet the growing demand for bikes in Providence. With increased donations and requests for reconditioned bikes, RAB moved into an abandoned garage space behind the City Arts building on Broad St. RAB kept most of the same programs going, with an emphasis on the youth workshops. In the new space RAB was much more visible and accessible to the kids in the Broad Street neighborhood.

Still expanding to meet increased requests for reconditioned bikes, RAB moved again to the site of the former Providence Steel Co. RAB and The Steel Yard, a young non profit industrial arts education organization, com-

bined their bike reconditioning programs to create the present day bike repair workshop. At their present location RAB continues to expand the program, look for new volunteers and new sources of funding. They added Bicycle Maintenance classes to the Steel Yard's course curriculum, initiated a "mechanics" evening workshop to train volunteers to create complete new bikes out of donated bike parts, and created the women's Sunday afternoon workshop, their most productive program. RAB open workshops and Tuesday evening mechanic workshops enabled RAB to roll out more bikes in 2007 than any other year.



As plans for renovating the building that houses Recycle-A-Bike get underway, RAB hopes to continue the relationship with and create a permanent home at the Steel Yard. Once their new space is completed they will welcome old bikes and new volunteers to help kids build bikes. NBW will coordinate a bike donation event when the new space is ready to receive your old Trek, Jamis, Cannondale, or Schwinn. Save your old bike for a kid who will love it like you do.

Look for more details in the next issue of *The Spoke'n Word*.



"Beware of errant golf balls" says the sign, Woonasquatucket River bike path.