



# Program that helps repair bikes making its mark on Jackson community

Posted by Jessica Sipperley | Jackson Citizen Patriot May 11, 2009 07:15AM

In a basement room filled with bicycles of different sizes and colors, volunteers work to turn unwanted sets of wheels into trusty means of transportation for Jackson children and adults.

The Community Bike Program, through the [Fitness Council of Jackson](#), fixes adult and children's bikes that have been donated by local residents, while teaching residents about safe cycling.

The program is growing. At the Bike Round-Up donation drive last month, the council collected 60 bikes — up from 10 the year before, said Scott TenBrink, the council's executive director.

## More info

- Repair Night: 6:30 to 9 p.m. Mondays in the basement at 211 W. Ganson St.
- Build a Bike Program: 4 to 6 p.m. Mondays at St. John's United Church of Christ, 801 S. Mechanic St.
- Free for kids to attend
- Next program set to start June 1, if there is enough interest
- For more information or to volunteer, call Scott TenBrink at 990-9798 or visit [www.fitnesscouncil.org](http://www.fitnesscouncil.org).

"It has nothing to do with building bikes, for me. It has to do with building bicyclists," TenBrink said. "We want to get bikes and education out to people."

Once a week at Repair Night, volunteers sift through bikes and fix what they can. They also salvage parts from unusable bikes and recycle them, TenBrink said. When a bike is ready to go, a volunteer marks the seat with a piece of blue tape.

Adult bicycles are fixed up for prison parolees who complete a two-hour class about bicycle safety led by TenBrink and arranged through the Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative.

Many parolees who complete the class then volunteer at Repair Night. Initially, it was an idea to earn community service hours, but it has had a greater impact, TenBrink said.

"Some of these guys have been totally transformed by the program," he said. "It's the idea of getting around by their own power. There is a lot of freedom stuff that parolees deal with."

Runis, a Jackson resident, volunteered at a Repair Night immediately after taking the class. Like other parolees in the Re-entry Initiative, he was able to give only his first name.

"After I completed the class, I was given a bike, and I like it," said Runis, carefully shining the handlebars of a green Schwinn. "Being able to come down here and work on bikes, it's a blessing. It's the first time in my life I've been able to help and give back."

Bicycles for children are distributed through the Build a Bike program, a series of five classes about bicycle safety and repair led by TenBrink and sponsored by the Partnership Park Neighborhood Development Association. Topics include brakes, seats and changing a flat tire.

"I only take five kids per class. In the first class, I had six; in the second, I had seven," TenBrink said. "I have a hard time turning them down."

After children complete the program, TenBrink rewards them with a bicycle and helmet. The ultimate goal is to learn safe, effective riding and then to complete a three-mile ride together, TenBrink said.

"They learn about tools, they learn to be organized, and they learn how to ride bikes on the road safely," said Martha Fuerstenau, a Jackson resident who volunteers with the program.

Classes are geared toward children ages 10 and older, although a similar class could be created for younger kids, TenBrink said. Other changes could help the Community Bike Program expand — like a larger space.

"We need something geared toward a shop, not an office space," TenBrink said, adding that the United Way is checking into possible sites.

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