

## Community Bike Program efforts span the community

Posted by [jsipperl](#) May 09, 2009 07:27AM

I recently put together a story about the Community Bike Program, which is run by the Fitness Council of Jackson, for the Citizen Patriot. I started pursuing the story to find out about the success of a recent bike donation drive in honor of Earth Day. But what started as a simple local piece turned into a deeper feature story. The foundation of the bike program is not just collecting bikes and distributing them to the community; it's a much larger operation than that, and it touches a variety of groups in Jackson. The constraints of the print product didn't allow me to include as much detail as I would have liked, but the Web is limitless. Here is some extra coverage you won't find in the newspaper.

The leader of the Community Bike Program is Scott TenBrink, the executive director of the Fitness Council, and the heart is Repair Night. One night per week, volunteers gather to fix up discarded bikes — replacing parts and getting the bikes ready for new owners. Repair Night volunteers fix bikes up for two methods of distribution: adult bicycle classes through the Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative (MPRI) and children's bicycle classes through the Partnership Park Neighborhood Development Association.

Parolees from the MPRI comprise a large part of the volunteer pool for Repair Night. I was able to talk with three parolees; all of them had taken the adult bicycle class led by TenBrink through the MPRI and received a bike. They were all volunteering to return the favor.

Dino is running a small bicycle repair operation of his own, and someday wants to open his own business. "I'm always trying to recruit people to come down here. A lot of good things are coming out of this program," he said.

Runis took the adult bicycle class immediately after being released, and then came back to volunteer on the next Repair Night.

Barry has been volunteering for about seven months. He makes sure the bikes are ready for new owners and "likes giving a helping hand."

When I stopped by Repair Night last month, all the volunteers, residents and parolees alike, were hard at work. There was joking and laughter, but they were taking their duties seriously. They were fixing up the bikes that would serve as transportation for the next group of parolees to successfully complete TenBrink's course.

The adult classes could expand past MPRI efforts. Twelve adults with J-Town Clubhouse, a group that reaches out to people with mental illnesses, have gone through TenBrink's class, and other community groups, including Michigan Rehabilitation Services and the Women, Infants and Children program (WIC), could soon follow suit.

The Community Bike Program also fixes up children's bikes. TenBrink leads the Build a Bike program at St. John's United Church of Christ, 801 S. Mechanic St., on Mondays from 4 to 6 p.m. Each afternoon, kids come to the church and learn about bicycle repair and safety. After completing the five-class series, a child gets a bike and a helmet to keep.

"I want kids to know how their bikes work and be safe, effective riders," TenBrink said. During one class, he led eight boys through a series of bicycle drills and maneuvers. In their matching blue helmets, the parade of young bicyclists rode in a straight line, weaved in and out of cones and played Follow the Leader. TenBrink was competing with the allure of a bicycle, in warm weather, in an open parking lot for their attention, but he

kept things at an even keel throughout the class. I could tell each boy was enjoying the after-school activity — something to keep busy, a form of exercise and learning masked with the fun of riding a bike.

This program deserves attention and support, and reflects well on Jackson as a community. Kudos to TenBrink and all the volunteers for keeping the wheels turning.

Check out the story online at the [Citizen Patriot Web site](#), and watch the accompanying video that highlights the Build a Bike program. If you're interested in volunteering, or know of a community group that could benefit from adult bicycle classes, call TenBrink at 990-9798, or visit the Fitness Council Web site at [www.fitnesscouncil.org](http://www.fitnesscouncil.org) for more information.

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