



At the Concord Community Center the day of the bike drive, Mike Klaus poses with two bikes that his sons Adam and Gordon learned how to ride on. Klaus said he held onto them for nearly 30 years thinking he would eventually fix them up and give them to some little beginners. In the background Dale Konle, from Concord, hands bikes down to John Nichols from Watertown.

Contributed photo

BY DAVID BRAZY
Family & Friends staff

**Good
deed
clears
clutter
for police**

The Watertown Police Department finds them all over; abandoned in bushes, left in the parks, laying out in yards or propped up against buildings across the city.

In all, the police department recovers approximately 100 bicycles a year in various conditions from good to what can only be described as rusted pieces of junk. Police Chief Tim Roets said most of the bikes are collected after a citizen reports observing them abandoned.

Roets said the department makes every effort to locate owners by searching their records to see if the bike had been registered and by using the serial number to search a state database for stolen property. The department must hold onto all of the recovered bikes for 90 days to give owners the chance to claim them. If the department does not find an owner in the allotted time, it sends the bikes into storage to await the city's annual auction.

"We are successful in returning some bikes, but usually auction approximately 75 bikes, with the majority being sold for \$2 to \$15," Roets said.

"Many of the bikes are in poor to very poor condition," Roets said.

"It's not uncommon for some of the bikes to be disposed of at the metal recycler because they cannot even be sold at the auction."

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Enter Mike Klaus, whose group, Sustain Jefferson, recently completed a drive to collect bicycles to donate to the Chicago-based nonprofit organization Working Bikes Cooperative. While scouring Jefferson County for bikes, Klaus remembered a place he had seen in Watertown that was filled with abandoned bikes.

"I had this memory of all of the bikes down in the public works building from the city auction we went to and I was thinking, what do they do with all of those bikes?" Klaus said. "So I called Chief Roets and after two minutes with him he said, 'I would much rather see them go toward something like this.'"

Roets said he saw it as an opportunity to help others in need and reduce the time commitment required of two detectives to inventory and transport every bike from the storage location to the street department garage for the annual auction.

"Any profits from the bikes in poor condition were being offset by the labor costs involved in the process," Roets said.

Klaus and his wife, Ellen, who is the vice president of Sustain Jefferson, had met Working Bikes volunteer David Grayson earlier this year at the Midwest Renewable Energy Association fair in Custer. Ellen said she started talking to Grayson and he suggested Sustain Jefferson hold a bike drive for Working Bikes.

Grayson told the Daily Times Working Bikes was founded more than 10 years ago and started with the founder driving around in his pickup truck collecting bikes off the curb. The organization has since grown into a self-supporting organization with five to eight full-time employees, most of whom are bike mechanics, that takes in about 8,000 bikes a year.

Grayson said bikes donated to the organization can end up in several places. First, collectible or high-end mountain bikes are fixed up and re-sold at reasonable prices at the group's facility located at 2434 S. Western Ave., Chicago. Grayson said Working Bikes' entire operation is funded by the money it brings in through the retail sales.

That money goes to helping Working Bikes ship bikes to partner organization overseas in countries including Guatemala, Peru, Ghana, Kenya, Angola, Tanzania and Cuba. Grayson said for the past two years Working Bikes has shipped 5,000 to 6,000 bikes overseas and he added they are anticipating another 6,000 for this year.

"We pay for our shipping of the containers and you have to realize it's an expensive proposition to send bikes anywhere overseas. One shipping container can cost between \$3,000 and \$5,000 and we have between 12 and 15 shipments a year," Grayson said. "We are really proud we pay for our own shipping costs and it is all funded through our retail operation."



Sustain Jefferson member Buck Smith, of Johnson Creek, removes the pedals from a children's bike. Volunteers removed the pedals and turned the handlebars 90 degrees on the donated bikes to allow for tighter packing and stacking of bicycles in the truck bound for the Working Bikes headquarters in Chicago.

Contributed photo

In addition to sending bikes overseas Working Bikes also donates bikes to organizations in the United States. Grayson said last year Working Bikes donated 700 bikes to organizations in Detroit, New Orleans and locally in Chicago.

Grayson added they do get some bikes that are in such bad shape that it would not make sense to try and repair them. These bikes, Grayson said, end up being scrapped at recycling plants with that money used to fund the organization as well.

These old bikes taking up space in garages, basements and barns in the U.S. can make a huge difference for the lives of someone living in a developing country, Grayson said.

"I think most people can understand that in countries where the standards of living are such that cars are out of reach for most people, bicycles can really change a person's life," Grayson said. "They allow people to do business and allow kids to get to schools."

Not all of the bikes sent overseas are used just for transportation. Grayson said one group Working Bikes partners with out of Guatemala uses bikes to build working machines that can separate grain from corn, run small irrigation systems and bring water up from wells.

After speaking with Mike Klaus, Roets approached Mayor Ron Krueger with the idea to donate the bikes worth less than \$50 to Working Bikes. Krueger said he thought the idea was worthwhile and brought the idea to the Watertown Finance Committee who approved the bike donations to the charity.

Sustain Jefferson held the bike drive on Sept. 29 as a part of their Sustain Jefferson's Skills for Simple Living Fair at the Concord Community Center. Sustain Jefferson President Amy Rinard said the group was blown away by the response they received to the bike drive.

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David Grayson, a volunteer with Working Bikes, kept a running tally of the number of the bicycles as they were loaded for transport to Chicago.

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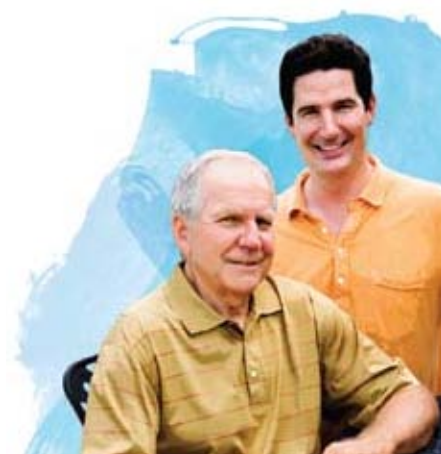
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“ Our initial goal was 50 bikes, but we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into. It was amazing, we collected 152 bikes, plus 16 child bicycle trailers, as well as stacks of all kinds of parts. ”

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“Our initial goal was 50 bikes, but we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into,” Rinard said. “It was amazing, we collected 152 bikes, plus 16 child bicycle trailers, as well as stacks of all kinds of parts.”

The 152 bikes donated included 19 from the Watertown Police Department, Rinard said.

In addition to the bikes from the police department, Ellen Klaus said they received bikes from all over Jefferson County.

Mike Klaus said many people were happy to finally stop storing the bikes and to see them do some good.

“People just hang onto these bikes and they don’t really have a use for them and they think some day I’ll give it to a

good cause,” Mike Klaus said.

Rinard said Sustain Jefferson would like to hold another bike drive next year. She said they collected all of these bikes in just one month for this year’s drive and if they collected for a whole year the number of bikes would increase.

While the group is still in the planning stage for another drive, Rinard said anyone who would like to donate a bike may contact Sustain Jefferson at info@sustainjefferson.org.

Grayson echoed Rinard and said he would like see another bike drive held in Jefferson County next year. He said a lot of the time when they hold a second bike drive in a community they receive even more bikes than the first year.



Bicycles, child bike trailers and bike parts are dropped off at the Concord Community Center during Sustain Jefferson’s bike collection for Working Bikes. In all, 152 bicycles, 16 bike trailers plus stacks of handlebars, wheels and bike frames were donated. A volunteer walks in the background carrying several wheels to be donated.

Contributed photo



The Watertown Police Department places identification tags on the bikes it stores at the public works building at 727 Cady St. If no one claims the bikes after 90 days the department attempts to sell them at the city auction.

DAVID BRAZY/Family & Friends

"I don't know how it happens, but Wisconsin has people with barns full of bikes," Grayson said with a laugh. "So hopefully we will be coming back next year and the numbers will be larger than what we got this year."

Roets said if Sustain Jefferson held another drive he would be more than happy to donate bikes from the department's storage area again.

"I would welcome the opportunity to participate in the program again," Roets said. "When I explained the mission of Working Bikes to the Watertown Finance Committee they mutually saw it as a great opportunity for Watertown to help communities, both inside and outside the United States, that are less fortunate than we are."



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