

## PRINCETON: Retiree's next cycle is a bike benefit

By Lauren Otis, Staff Writer

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PRINCETON -- After a full career in the New York publishing world, including stints at Reed Elsevier, Thompson and McGraw-Hill, Princeton Borough resident Russ White decided to embrace both his entrepreneurial and charitable sides when he retired.

He volunteered with the Princeton-area chapter of SCORE, which provides free business counseling for those seeking to start new businesses, then last year, after working part-time at Kopp's Cycle in downtown Princeton, he co-founded Firehouse Cycles in Yardley, Pa., pursuing his love of cycling.

Three months ago, Mr. White, 68, embarked on something that would combine all these interests, founding the Boys & Girls Club Bike Exchange, a social entrepreneurship venture, which receives donated bikes, has volunteers refurbish them and sells them at prices ranging from \$15 to \$65 to raise money for the Boys & Girls Club of Trenton & Mercer County.

The social venture has taken off in a way Mr. White couldn't envision when he was setting it up.

"We have sold 418 bikes to date; it's a huge number," Mr. White said in an interview last week.

He marveled at the fact the bike exchange is now the largest used bike seller in the area.

"All the money goes to the Boys & Girls Club. We've raised \$28,000 total, and our net to the Boys & Girls Club was \$24,000," Mr. White said.

Not bad for three months.

"It is very exciting; we are very pleased. The results are exceeding all our expectations," Mr. White said.

"This is the Boys & Girls Club's first attempt at business entrepreneurship, and it could not have gone more smoothly," said David Anderson, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club of Trenton & Mercer County.

"I credit the leadership of Russ White and the many bike enthusiasts he's recruited as volunteers. These funds are definitely going to have an impact on our kids," Mr. Anderson said.

Several factors led to his interest in starting a volunteer bike exchange, Mr. White recalled. First was the dearth of area venues to buy and sell used bikes.

"When I was at Kopp's and at Firehouse, people would come in every week asking, 'Do you sell used bikes? Where can you buy used bikes?'" and the answer was always Craigslist," he said.

Mr. White felt a physical store could serve used bike buyers better than Craigslist.

"I thought about this a long time and that the best business model would be to do it through a charitable organization," he said. The operation would take donated bikes, rebuild and sell them with donated labor from a donated site, making available reasonably-priced bikes to low-income families with the proceeds benefiting a charitable organization, he said. Encouraging



Volunteers Russ White and Rich Messina refurbish and sell donated bikes to benefit Boys & Girls Club of Mercer County and Trenton.

healthy, environmentally conscious cycling as well as recycling and reuse of older bikes were additional benefits, he added.

A critical factor to going ahead was it had been done before, Mr. White said.

"I thought about this for a few months in March of 2008. The TREK bike company — the largest bike company in the country — opened the same thing in Madison, Wis., with one exception," he said.

TREK paid employees and rent, effectively subsidizing the venture.

Mr. White wanted his bike exchange to be totally self-sustaining using only volunteers and donated space.

Still, the TREK example was critical to his interest in proceeding, Mr. White said. He talked to TREK about its operation.

"They collected 1,000 bikes in the first year and sold them. The fact that it was so successful was important to me because if they could do it, we could do it," he said.

Mr. White approached Mr. Anderson at the Boys & Girls Club about the concept and said Mr. Anderson was on board. The bike exchange is, in fact, not a separate nonprofit, but a part of the Boys & Girls Club, Mr. White said.

Mr. White then approached the Princeton Freewheelers and soon had more than two dozen volunteers to do everything from collect, repair and sell bikes to manage the operation. Another six or seven non-Princeton Freewheelers volunteers have signed on, too, after seeing what the bike exchange does, he said.

"So I started pounding the pavement on Route 1 to find donated space. I got rejected and rejected and rejected until I came upon Levin Management," Mr. White said.

Levin Management Corp. agreed to donate a large space at Capitol Plaza Shopping Center in Ewing, "so we opened up on May 1st."

One success has led to another. Individuals can donate bikes they no longer want at nearly every area bike store, plus a few other locations, Mr. White said. Several police departments — including Trenton's, Ewing's and Lawrence's — let the exchange collect abandoned and unclaimed bicycles, and Princeton University allowed it to collect abandoned bikes around its campus, he said.

And Sept. 25, as part of its bike safety day, Princeton University is going to hold a bike drive for the exchange, Mr. White said.

"That's a big deal because they have 5,000 employees," he said.

Right now, the bike exchange has an inventory of about 200 bicycles for sale, at its Capital Plaza store — everything from children's bicycles to expensive road bikes — all for \$65 or less, Mr. White said.

Mr. White said he is reaching out to the West Windsor Bicycle & Pedestrian Alliance as well as other organizations about working with the bike exchange.

After months of hard work on his part, Mr. White said the bike exchange now effectively runs itself. He still works at Firehouse Cycles a day or two a week while relishing the accomplishments of the bike exchange as well as its future, which seems already assured after just three months.

"We have 400 bikes that are in circulation now that wouldn't have been in circulation," said Mr. White. "It is self-sustaining, and it makes money for the Boys & Girls Club."

The Boys & Girls Club Bike Exchange is located at Capitol Plaza Shopping Center, 1500 North Olden Avenue, Ewing, NJ 08638. The exchange is open Thursdays 5 to 8 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, call (609) 571-9476, email [info@BikeExchangeNJ.org](mailto:info@BikeExchangeNJ.org) or go to the exchange Web site at [www.bikeexchangenj.org](http://www.bikeexchangenj.org).

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