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## Rising From The Ashes

An afterschool program is resurrected after losing funding.

By [David Schultz/The Connection](#)

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**A GROUP OF** teenagers are doing tricks on their BMX bikes on the sidewalk outside of an office building. One of them tries to get the frame of his bike over a railing but can't quite make it and loses his balance.

Undeterred, he laughs it off, saying "Practice makes perfect!"

This could be a scene that plays out in any urban area where young people purchase bikes to stave off boredom. But these teenagers didn't buy their bikes; they made them.

The youths are a part of Phoenix Bikes, an afterschool program that teaches local Arlington students the art of bicycle maintenance.

The program uses parts and supplies that have either been donated or found and works with students to show them how to create and maintain their own bikes. The students also run their own bike shop, which operates out of Barcroft Park, that sells discounted bikes to its customers.

**ACCORDING TO** Colin Dixon, the program's director, Phoenix Bikes engages its students not only by teaching them a craft, but also by showing them how to lead.

"In addition to learning a new skill," he said, "They're also able to teach a new skill and they do a lot of teaching each other."

Luke Idzaik is a volunteer with Phoenix Bikes. He said that, for the students, the program is about more than bike maintenance.

"It will foster a love of tinkering for them," he said. "They're doing a lot of mechanical work and a lot of improvising because we don't really have the best tools so we have to make do with what we have."

**LAST WEEK**, Phoenix Bikes celebrated its first birthday by holding a bike show and silent auction. That the program was able to do this, its organizers said, is in itself a minor miracle.

Phoenix Bikes started off several years ago as a County-run program called Community Spokes. But, after a federal grant ran out in the fall of 2006, the program was cut.

Dixon, along with parents and local businesses, rallied and came up with the funds to restart the program. It is now privately run but receives some County funds.

"Phoenix Bikes came more or less from the ashes of Community Spokes," Dixon said. "It is rising again to hold sway over Arlington, I guess. And also the same could be true of our bikes... They are given away or tossed out or found and they're reborn with Phoenix Bikes."

**BOBBIE JEANCOURT** is one parent who is very happy that Phoenix Bikes was reborn. Her 16-year-old son, Tommy Palmer, has made working on bicycles a major part of his life.

"He designs his own bikes, he makes his own bikes," she said. "He actually got a job in a commercial bike shop as a result of the skills he learned from this program... So [it] has been really great for him."

Jeancourt said that her son was struggling in school before discovering bikes. Now he wants to go to college to become a mechanical engineer. "I think he was kind of drifting along not knowing what he was going to do with his life and this is it," she said. "He spends all his free time with this program."

**AARON HERRERA**, a 14-year-old seventh grader at Gunston Middle School, is actively involved in Phoenix Bikes. He also said that Phoenix



Photo by [David Schultz/The Connection](#)

**Walter Tejada gets to know some of the Phoenix Bike students at the group's first annual bike show.**

### More

For more information about Phoenix Bikes, including instructions on how to donate, visit [www.phoenixbikes.org](http://www.phoenixbikes.org).

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Bikes has helped him achieve.

"My grades have improved," he said. "It's like my motivation because the only way I can come here is if I get my mom's permission. If I don't have good grades she won't let me come so I've been keeping up with school."

For the volunteers with Phoenix Bikes, it is this kind of story that makes their program so vital. "It's really a blessing for this whole area," Idzaik said. "I can't say enough about how much good this is doing for these kids lives. And they're having fun."



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