

## PRIDE IN A SWEET RIDE: PHOENIX BIKES

**WHEN YOU THINK** of bikers, perhaps you think spandex. Or maybe one rolled up jeans leg and a messenger bag. Either way, "community organization" probably doesn't spring to mind. Enter [Phoenix Bikes](#) (4200 S. Four Mile Drive, Arlington, 703-575-7762).

The one-year-old **Arlington** nonprofit hawks used cycles (a rarity in the **D.C.** area), offers discount repairs (though they might take longer than the typical bike shop) and teaches middle- and high-schoolers basic mechanic skills to get them psyched for owning wheels of their own — which they can eventually do through the **Earn-a-Bike** program.



"It's cool to see, because a lot of the kids come in and they haven't found their niche, and they're a little bit awkward," says director **Colin Dixon**. "But in two more weeks, they have a friend that comes in and they're showing off their bike-riding tricks, and they're telling their friend how to fix this crank or patch this tire."

The project arose from the ashes of **Community Spokes** — an **Arlington County** bike program that closed in 2006 — when a gang of do-gooders (including Dixon) decided to save the space and equipment for a similar venture. Community members donate bikes, which get refurbished by the kids and volunteers, who then sell the sets of wheels for about \$70, as opposed to the much larger chunks of cash one would spend for a new bike elsewhere. Mechanics hold weekly workshops to teach community members basic bike maintenance.

And Dixon and pals also take the 80 kids registered for their programs on bike outings — two weeks ago they headed out by **Eastern Market** to watch a bike polo tournament.

"They didn't do too much dumb stuff while riding around D.C.," he says. "They just were really excited to be out on their bikes and exploring something new."

With that kind of a vibe, it's no wonder the **Washington City Paper** just named Phoenix Bikes its editors' pick for the area's best bike shop. But it's not an easy ride. As with most nonprofits, Phoenix relies heavily on volunteers, and their passions can be fickle.

"I'm sure there will be some burnout to some degree, so, hopefully, we'll figure out a way to manage that," Dixon says.

Though it has an advantage over other nonprofits — Phoenix sell bikes, and thus has a built-in source of revenue, however paltry — neither Community Spokes nor **Chain Reaction**, a similar program in D.C., lasted more than six years.

After making it through one year unscathed, though, Dixon's hopes for the future are high. And the place certainly knows how to throw a good party. To celebrate its first birthday, the shop held a bash showcasing some of the oddest bikes around. One was plastered with carbon fiber in the shape of a spider web. Another was built of bamboo. A third, hooked up to a blender, was used to make smoothies for party guests.

But the most impressive bike on display was the **Legnano SS**, constructed and customized with the help of a group of kids from Phoenix Bikes.

*Photo by Marge Ely/Express*

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