

Spinning old junk into new opportunity

Kitchissippi VOLUNTEERS

By David MacDonald

While there's wisdom in the old adage, "One man's junk is another man's treasure," the challenge can come when those two men live 8,000 kilometres apart.

Bicycles for Humanity (B4H) is an organization that is overcoming such obstacles - to get so-called 'junk' into the hands of those that truly need them. The program sends unwanted bicycles to disadvantaged communities in Africa.

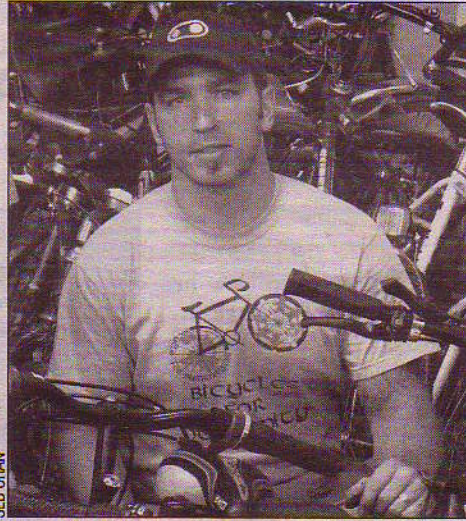
Area bike enthusiast Craig Barlow, a Hintonburg resident, first heard about the program two years ago at a local bike shop, and was drawn to the fact that volunteers' time and efforts go straight to the people in need.

"There is no middle man or bureaucracy," explains Barlow. "All donations go directly to empowering people through transportation."

Barlow took a brochure home with him and looked for ways to get involved. He learned that through the work of B4H, the recipients of the bicycles received a way to travel, thereby helping improve their access to health care, education, food, water and employment. In short, receiving a bike could really make a difference in somebody's life.

Fast forward to May 2010, and Barlow, along with a number of other volunteers, is gearing up for his third bike drive with the organization. A family man and avid cyclist, Barlow is one of the organization's most involved volunteers and has played a number of different roles with B4H. Whether it's gathering up the bikes at one of the drop-off points, stripping the bikes to prepare for shipping or loading them into the container, Barlow has volunteered a great deal of time and effort for the B4H cause.

"It's quite an undertaking," explains Barlow. "But when the day is done, it's a nice feeling knowing that the next time those doors to the shipping container open it will be somewhere in Africa and those previously unwanted bikes that



Craig Barlow is an avid volunteer with B4H, an organization that collects unwanted bikes and sends them to African communities where they are much needed.

have been sitting in someone's garage or basement will be given to people who truly need and want them."

B4H also purchases shipping containers that are on their last use and would otherwise be disposed of. Then, when the bikes arrive in Africa, they add a window and a door and actually turn the shipping container into a bike shop.

Barlow has been hands on with B4H from the start. The process begins with used bicycles and bicycle parts being gathered at designated drop-off points across the city. After the bike drive phase is complete, Barlow and the other volunteers begin the process of taking the bikes apart. Removing pedals, turning handlebars, lowering seats and sorting through parts usually takes a couple of nights. The next step is loading the bikes into the container to be shipped.

This year's Bicycle for Humanity bike drive will get started on May 22 between 9 a.m. and 12 p.m., with five bike drop-off locations being set up across the city:

- Kanata: Myers Chevrolet Buick GMC, 200-2500 Palladium Drive
- Barrhaven: Jack May Chevrolet Buick GMC, 3788 Prince of Wales Drive
- Nepean: Myers Cadillac Chevrolet, 1200 Baseline Road
- Ottawa: Belisle Chevrolet Cadillac, 444 Montreal Road
- Ottawa South: Jim Tubman, 1770 Bank Street

B4H is looking for adult-sized mountain bikes and hybrid bikes that are in working condition. To learn more or to get involved, visit www.B4HOttawa.org or contact Seb Oran at seb@bicycles-for-humanity.org.