

In addition to wheels, the gift of a bike offers values lesson

By Anthony Siracusa

Monday, December 29, 2008

A bicycle has been on every kid's Christmas list at least once.

The independence a bicycle affords the average 12 year old is unparalleled by most other gifts.

The bicycle becomes a vehicle for a young person, providing opportunities to see places not seen before. Bicycle rides are wonderful opportunities for recreation and inspiration, taking us farther than we might otherwise have ventured.

For a group of youths from Memphis' Mason YMCA, that distant destination this Christmas was Shelby Farms.

For the third year, the Shelby Farms Park Conservancy teamed with Revolutions Community Bicycle Shop, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee and the Mason YMCA to provide recycled bicycles to 17 young people. The event was more than your average Christmas bicycle giveaway.

The young participants attended a workshop that explained how we recycle a bicycle in Memphis: A bike is donated to Revolutions Community Bicycle Shop, patrons come to the shop looking for a reliable used bicycle and the trained mechanics at Revolutions teach them how to restore the bicycle to working order.

After the workshop, the group made posters to illustrate their understanding of recycling. They drew dusty mountain bikes pulled from musty garages, showed the bicycles deposited at Revolutions and drew pictures of themselves zipping between trees on off-road trails.

Over a period of two weeks, the youths traveled to Revolutions with their parents to adjust brakes, fix flat tires and straighten bent rims on 17 bikes.

On Dec. 20, they gathered at Shelby Farms to participate in a mountain bike safety workshop led by Hal Mabry, owner of the Peddler Bicycle Shop. After learning the basics of mountain bike riding, Mabry and a team of volunteers from Cirque de Velo cycling team and the Mid-South Trails Association led them on a 6-mile off-road ride through the Tour de Wolf trail.

Sprinting, laughing, changing gears and making hairpin turns, they bounded through

the park on their first off-road bike ride.

I watched as these young people received a gift even greater than a bicycle. In our modern urban life, sustainability is a term we often hear but rarely understand. By definition, sustainability means meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations. Teaching this idea to young people requires a lived experience.

Enlisting these 17 young people in the restoration of used bicycles and inviting them to access natural areas preserved for outdoor recreation gave them the chance to enjoy the independence of the bicycle while learning what it means to be sustainable.

This is the gift that 17 young people are likely to remember for many Christmases to come.

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