Written by By William Madaras
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Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services and the Gallup Boys and Girls Club are fixing up old, broken bicycles and converting them into mountain bikes that will blaze trails in the

local hills. So far five bikes have been refurbished with 30 being worked on which will be ridden by 30 Gallup youths ages 5-14 who have signed up for the club's summer program.

The "Fix Bikes for Kids" program began in June and is designed to provide exercise and fun for Gallup's younger residents, leveraging the areas' expansive and adventurous landscape while building a spirit of competition and comradery. However, the goal is also to address the high rate of diabetes. In 2016, diabetes was the 6th leading cause of death for New Mexicans and the 7th leading cause in the U.S.

The program was born as an initiative by Marisa Hutchinson, CEO of the Gallup Boys and Girls Club. She had noticed abandoned bikes around Gallup and recognized that with some repair, they could be used by her club's members. She enlisted the aid of the local Boy Scouts who began repairing two-wheelers along with bikes requiring training wheels.

The scouts of Troop 47 repaired over a dozen bikes. About 14 Boy Scouts and five to six adults spent an evening creating an assembly line to repair numerous flat tires and brakes. They have also volunteered several Saturdays to provide specific details to ensure some of the bicycles would stand up to the rigors of Gallup's hilly bike trails.

RMCHCS Wellness Center's employee Johnathan Gutierrez also volunteered to help fix the bikes as did his co-worker Lisa Rodriguez. The need for assistance also caught the attention of RMCHCS CEO David Conejo. As a birthday surprise for his wife, Conejo made a financial donation to the effort, in his wife's name, to help launch the program.

Meanwhile, Scott Nydam, a former professional cyclist and former owner of the closed Silver Stallion Coffee & Bread Co., located between Coal and Aztec avenues in downtown Gallup, is now turning the space into a community bike organization/bike service where he plans to refurbish bikes and sell them. Gutierrez and Rodriguez spoke with Nydam about the initiative and he and his team of bike mechanics agreed to participate.

In addition to helping repair bikes, Nydam is also offering programs to teach kids how to fix bikes.

“Gallup has graveyards of abandoned bikes buried in basements, storage sheds, and garages. Some are in bad shape, others have only a flat tire. We’re ready to bring these bikes back to life,” Nydam said. “It is great to have a partner like RMCHCS. People go there for rehabilitation while the bikes come here.”

Nydam believes that biking can change lives and teach kids the importance of physical exercise.

“For myself and countless others, riding a bike has become a lifeblood. It’s not anything about being in the limelight, it’s about having fun and changing your life for the better,” he said.

HELPS YOUTHS BUILD CHARACTER

“The Fix Bikes for Kids program not only teaches kids a skill like bicycle repair, but more importantly it builds life skills like responsibility, sportsmanship, respect for team members and working with others,” Hutchinson said.

She noted that many of the goals of the bike program are like those of the Boys and Girls Club, which teach the importance of volunteering, respect for others, friendship and healthy lifestyles. The Gallup branch has about 20-100 members, depending on the season and activities being offered such as boys and girls sports programs.

On June 30, from 11 am - noon, Rehoboth McKinley Christian Healthcare Services Wellness Center, 1910 Red Rock Drive , (across the street from the hospital) will exhibit and display mountain bikes refurbished and repaired from Gallup’s bicycle graveyards during a “Bikes-For-Kids” event.

Media Contact: William Madaras (William@Glasslanternpr.com)

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