

City Councilor readies to give away 1,000th bicycle

Bob Ehler completes his 990th bicycle repair

By Caitlyn May
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Cottage Grove City Councilman Bob Ehler is a man of few words. But his actions are loud and clear.

For the past three and a half years, Ehler has been donating his time and money to provide bicycles to Cottage Grove residents who are in need of a ride. He tinkers with broken chains and gummed-up gears, making repairs for free and keeping count with photographs stored on his phone and computer. This week, after a quick count, he has fixed and donated his 990th bicycle.

So, what does closing in on his 1,000th good deed feel like?

"It's just something I do," Ehler said after a pause, the statement followed by another long silence.

The only time he really speaks about his bicycle philanthropy is when he needs more bikes to fix. Such was the case in December when he made the push to give away bicycles for Christmas. Now, he has a waiting list.

The venture started on Facebook on a community group when Ehler saw a post.

"I saw a lady on a Facebook group who was going to give away a bike but it had to be fixed," he previously told The Sentinel. "And I thought, 'I can do that. I've been fixing bikes since I was a kid.' So, I volunteered and the next thing I know, people were giving me bikes."

It's a simple system. People looking for bicycles or bicycle repairs can contact Ehler through the community Facebook group dubbed Pay it Forward. He keeps a list of those in need of bikes and then



PHOTO BY CAITLYN MAY/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

In December of last year Councilor Bob Ehler stands next to one of the bikes he plans to repair and give away.

relies on the donation of bicycles through the same Facebook page to fill those orders. His list often varies based on the current need. Last winter, he needed 24" girl bikes to keep pace with the requests coming in. Other times, mountain bikes top the list.

He's dedicated a fenced-in area in his backyard to the effort where bikes hang from the rafters of a shop overhang and stand grouped in piles that make perfect sense to Ehler. Some need chains, others brakes, others handgrips. In December,

Ehler estimated that each bike's repair ran an average of \$25; an amount that comes out of his own pocket.

Ehler doesn't think it will be very long until he's handed out his 1,000th bicycle—it could be weeks—but he has no intention of stopping and encourages people who are in need of a bicycle to contact him through Facebook.

While the cost of fixing the bicycles sometimes increases wait times, plans to continue providing rides.

SLSD updated on bond projects, construction

By Zach Silva
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Matt Allen can finally breathe a little easier. The South Lane School District Maintenance and Facilities manager has been working on the new Harrison Elementary School from its infancy and the finish line is now in sight.

"Everything is just starting to take shape and it's starting to feel like home. Like a building we're going to settle into," Allen told the board at Monday night's school board meeting.

"I'm not worried now."

With all major construction projects out of the way, Allen reported that from now until August, when furniture will be put in the building, the focus has changed.

"Just the fine details. When you walk around, I mean, I'm not a perfectionist but it's going to be right and tight. And our general contractors are like-minded," he said. "They're proud. And we have subs that are from here and they're proud. So, it just feels good. Everybody wants this."

Glass has been placed in windows, and flooring and electronics are now making their way into the building.

"It's coming alive now," he said.

Allen also reported on the other main project that SLSD is working on: the pool renovation.

With money from a 2016 bond, the school district will be updating the Warren H. Daughtery Aquatic Center. With that money, the district is scheduled to spend \$5.1 million on the pool. The estimation for the current pool is currently at \$5.7 million. While community donors are working to raise enough to cover the difference, Allen is also working to avoid price escalation that has been seen in other district projects as well as around the state.

"When you're pushing through a design... there's room for design cost escalation, material inflation, all those things. Those are variables that you have to build in at a really big contingency," said Allen.

"And I don't think we want to do that with the pool. With the pool we want to be finalized in design and hard bid this project. That way when we come to you we're not telling you what we hope the project will cost, we'll be telling you what the project will cost."

The renovation project will see new locker rooms at the aquatic center as well as a pool that is regulation length so that events can be held there. The pool will also feature wider steps that can be used for swimming lessons.

"We will be concise going into this pool project and South Lane will be proud," said Allen.

The pool is scheduled to close in September and will be closed for 11 months while the project is being completed.

Swim teams are expected to use nearby facilities to maintain their practice schedule. The district will fund transportation costs.

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-Amy Swearengin
Harrison Kindergarten teacher

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