

February 16, 2009

Students' bike shop plan in Epping needs lift

By Jason Schreiber

EPPING – Students planning to build a booming bicycle repair business in the basement of Watson Academy need a few good repairmen to put them in high gear.

The new community bike shop will be run through the town's recreation department and will teach young bicyclists how to repair their bikes when they get a flat or something else breaks down.

One of the first steps in getting the shop off the ground is finding people with bicycle maintenance experience willing to train the students running the shop.

Once they learn what to do, the students will be able to advise youngsters who come into the shop looking to fix their bikes.

Recreation Director Seth Hickey said he hopes workers from area bike shops will come forward and offer a workshop to educate the youth about bike maintenance.

The push for the shop began last year when five youths from the summer recreation program wrote up a proposal seeking \$1,000 in seed money from Youth Venture, a national nonprofit that helps teams of young people start their own civic organizations or businesses.

The Epping group of fifth- through eighth-graders was awarded the money and is now modeling its bike shop after a similar one in Massachusetts.

The shop is expected to open once the snow begins to melt and young riders get back on their bikes.

"There isn't a place for youth to go in town to get bike services. This would just provide another resource for them," Hickey said.

The shop cleared one hurdle recently when selectmen approved the bike shop plan. Some selectmen had expressed concern about the town's liability if one of the shop's youths fixed a bike and something went wrong afterward.

To minimize the liability, Hickey said, he plans to have the shop youths advise those who need repairs of what they need to do as they change flat tires and make other repairs themselves.

The shop could also eventually offer classes and clinics, Hickey said.

In a letter to selectmen, seventh-grader Andrew Sweet, president of the bike shop, stressed the importance of making sure that the bikes are fixed properly. Before a bike leaves the shop, he said, it will need to pass the standard requirements. The brakes must work efficiently, tires must have proper tread and be properly inflated, and all bolts must be tightly secured.

Andrew said the shop will be a "place where kids are able to be in a constructive, yet fun environment to better improve their skills of maintaining bikes."