

Service to Community Through Bikes

Origins of the Golden Optimists Bicycle Recycle Program

Roots in Community Service – Optimist International

The Golden Optimists Bicycle Recycle Program evolved out of a long history of people working to improve the lives of children and their communities through the service organization Optimist International. Just after World War I in 1919 with spirits high in America Optimist International was founded and clubs and membership expanded throughout the country and eventually the world. The Optimist Creed “Promise Yourself” offers 10 statements to inspire people to be positive and do good in the world. The motto of Optimist International is “Bringing out the best in kids.”

The Optimist Creed

Promise Yourself



To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.

To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet.

To make all your friends feel that there is something in them.

To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true.

To think only of the best, to work only for the best, and to expect only the best.

To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.

To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.

To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile.

To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.

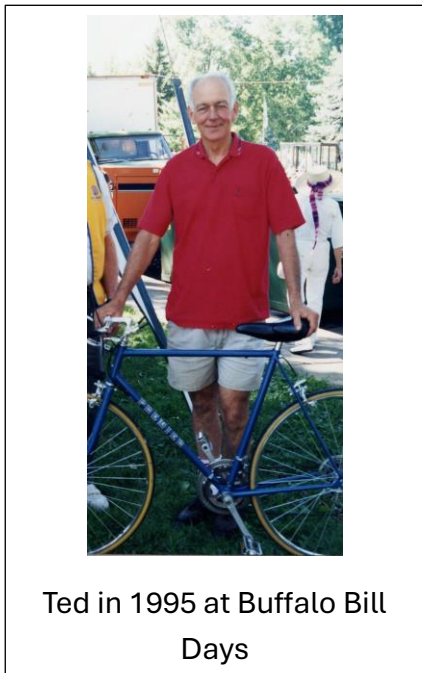
To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

The Breakfast Golden Optimist Club has been around Golden since at least the 1950's. They raised funds for their service activities in the community through selling Christmas trees. In those early years club members went up to the mountains to cut the trees and bring them down to Golden to sell with the help of Junior Optimist club members. By 1980 they were still selling trees but purchased them from tree farms and sold them with the help of boy scouts. Membership in 1971 was 35; in 1988 it was 32; in 1994 20; 2014 it was 14; in 2024 it was 6. Like many classic service organizations that began in the early 20th century, the model does not seem to resonate with people today and memberships are declining.

A review of scrapbooks and a few club records that span the 1970's to the 1990's indicates that the Golden Optimists undertook a variety of service activities fairly typical of other Optimist clubs. They sponsored essay and oratorical contests, participated in Buffalo Bill Days, supported local Christmas charity programs, provided medical equipment for newborns, supported “Help Them Hear,” awarded “Policeman of the Year” sponsored a Boy Scout troop , helped with community projects like the Chimney Gulch Trail, supported the employment of disabled youth at the library for 20 years, bought school supplies for kids, and among all these the occasional mention of putting on **bike safety programs**.

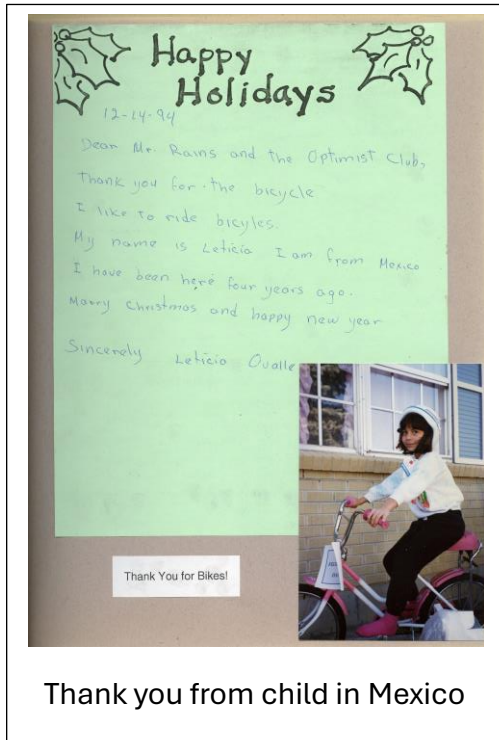
Bikes Bikes Bikes – The Program Begins Mid-Late 1980’s

While bike safety has been a broad topic that Optimist International and its clubs embrace, repairing and directing them to youth and others who need them is not a widespread focus of the larger organization. There are other clubs that may do this, but Golden grew a particular focus on this community service because of the interests and passions of its members. The Golden Optimists developed a program to repair bikes and give them to groups that primarily serve abused or underprivileged children in the Golden/Denver area. This fit perfectly into the overall Optimist mission of helping youth and community.



Ted Rains (1937 – 2023), was a project engineer at Coors Brewery in Golden, who loved bicycling, camping, everything automotive, and being with family. He was a member of the Golden Optimists and started the bicycle program around the mid to late 1980’s. According to a newspaper article in the Arvada Press in August of 2013, Ted said: *“The Optimists were looking for something to do to help a bit and I bought a brand new bicycle and had an old bike to get rid of. I found out it can be hard to get rid of old bikes, so I said why don’t we collect bikes like this and give them to a senior citizen center.”* The senior citizen center took a few bikes, but there wasn’t a real need for them because residents did not use them very much, Rains said. *“The bikes kept coming, a lot of children’s bikes too, so I said “Let’s see if we can give these away.”*

Word got out that old bicycles were being accepted, so people brought more and more of them to Ted’s yard. Most of the repairs were done in his garage and driveway. Bikes were given to groups such as Rude Recreation Center in Denver, Denver Police Department, Wheat Ridge YMCA, Colorado Christian Home, Christian Action Guild, students at the Colorado School of Mines, and individual children and adults. As the program grew, the supply of used bikes outpaced repair and bikes continued to accumulate in Ted’s yard to a



Thank you from child in Mexico

point where a neighbor who was tired of looking at the bicycles filed a complaint with the City of Golden. According to his wife Mary Rains, *“The Golden Police were working with the project, so nothing happened. The police from Golden and Lakewood would donate many abandoned or stolen bicycles.”* Another lady stepped up and located a moving van that was taking school supplies and furnishings to El Paso, TX through Catholic Charities, who agreed to top it off with bicycles from Ted’s yard. The organization’s counterpart in Juarez, just across the border in Mexico, sent children over to pick out bikes and ride them home back across the border.

Soon the bicycle program was looking for help in locating space. Ted Rains put an article into the Golden Transcript in December, 1994: *“The community’s generosity is such that taking in donated bikes is often easier than getting rid of them. Rains is hopeful that someone with good organizational skills, capable of efficiently distributing the bikes will join the Optimists and help with the program. At present, the program has grown so large that storage has become a problem. The bikes are currently being kept inside the vacated Golden Recreation Center, but that is only temporary, and the Optimists are desperately looking for a permanent storage facility.”* At this time, Ted estimated that they repaired and gave away about 100 bikes per year.

The Breakfast Optimist Club of Golden sent a letter in March of 1995 to the Golden Civic foundation looking for help building a storage facility. It noted that:

- The program has donated 400 bicycles in the last 6 years
- The Optimists have 50 to 100 bicycles “awaiting their destiny”
- The program has outgrown member’s driveways and temporary storage at United Methodist Church, Lookout Mountain Boy’s Facility, the old Golden Recreation Center, and Heritage Square

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The request was for the Foundation to provide half (\$3000) of the total cost of building a 700 square foot storage facility, with the other \$3000 provided by the Optimists from their annual Christmas tree sale. The Golden Civic Foundation approved the grant in April, and by May the Optimists had secured a donated 30 foot x 30 foot space in Heritage Square to erect the shed. The Optimists purchased a Quonset hut type shed and put it together on a concrete slab donated by the management of Heritage Square.



Optimists erecting the Quonset hut

The Quonset Hut Years and Impact 1995 – 2015

There are many volunteers and Optimists that have contributed to the bike program, but in addition to Ted Rains another particularly notable person is Howard Bagdad (1941 – 2018). Howard grew up in the Bronx, NY, and served in the National Guard. He developed severe asthma and pneumonia, left the Guard, and went to National Jewish Hospital in 1963, which saved his life. He stayed in Colorado and moved to Golden in 1972 with a job as a draftsman for Coors. At Coors, he got involved with bicycles and joined the Denver Bicycle Touring Club. The St. Vincents Home for Children wanted some bikes, and Howard knew Ted Rains from Coors and joined the Optimists around 2000 to get involved with bikes. He and Ted were the heart and face of the Optimist’s bicycle program for many years. As quoted in a 2015 article in the Golden Transcript, Howard said *“I like giving bikes to people who desperately need one. And I like to work with the international students from Mines who come to get a bike. They really appreciate it.”*



Howard and Ted at Heritage Square



Ted with CSM students

Ted Rains also really liked giving away many bikes to international students at CSM. In an Arvada Press article August 15, 2013, Ted said *“Often because of where they are from, they don’t understand the concept. They try to pay us when we say ‘No Cost.’ They give us a funny look and say ‘Why do you do this? Are you crazy?’ and we explain to them about Optimists International and the service club concept and they really appreciate it. They live too far off campus to walk, so in a lot of cases a bike is almost a necessity.”* At this time Ted estimated that they gave away about 200 – 250 bikes per year.



Beginning around 2007, the Golden Optimists began transporting some bikes to Navajo and Hopi people in Arizona. Through a connection with a local pastor, an Optimist took bikes along with clothes and food to the Whippoorwill Chapter of the Navajo Nation. This project grew a little each year until the Optimists got a small trailer to take the bikes and stayed a few days to do repairs. Other

locations such as Old Oraibi in the Hopi Reservation and Navajo Gospel Mission in the Hardrock later became sites for bike give-aways and repairs.

The impact of the small but mighty Golden Optimists Bicycle Recycle Program was huge. Governor John Hickenlooper sent a letter to Ted Rains in October of 2012, congratulating him on receiving the Golden Mayor’s Award of Excellence and his service “repairing and giving away between 6,000 and 9,000 bicycles to citizens of Golden and Denver, Native Americans, and citizens of Mexico, Tanzania, and Haiti through the Golden Optimist Bicycle Recycle Program.” About that time Howard was also recognized as a Channel 7 “Everyday Hero” for his work with the bicycle program.

Official Non-Profit Status and a New Home – 2015 – 2023

The Breakfast Golden Optimist Club is a 501(c)4 service organization and members recognized that the bicycle program would be in a better position to apply for grants and do fundraising if it established 501(c)3 status. Looming on the horizon was the possibility of Heritage Square closing and the ensuing loss of the Quonset hut site. Suzy Stutzman, who joined the Optimists in 2013 after a long career planning National Parks, liked fixing bikes at the Quonset hut but was also drawn to the challenge of planning for the future of the bike program. In early 2015 the Optimists sent her to a week-long training for non-profit leadership. Suzy helped the group establish the Golden Optimists Bicycle Recycle Program (GOBRP) as a separate 501(c)3 organization with the State of Colorado and the Internal Revenue Service that year. The first board of directors was comprised of Breakfast Club



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members: Suzy Stutzman, chair, Scott Perin, treasurer, Howard Bagdad, Carol Cameron, Bernie Craig, John Dougherty, Ed Greivel, Ted Rains, and Miki Stuebe. Separate finances were set up, bylaws enacted, insurance was procured, a new logo adopted, and a website was established.

The closure of Heritage Square became official in a letter from the ownership that the lease for the bike shop Quonset hut would be terminated at the end 2015 and required the removal of the building within 120 days thereafter. An article in the Golden Transcript on December 15, 2015, alerted the community to the need for a new space:

The program must find a place that can be leased at low or no-cost. “We’ve been tied to the community for many years. An ideal location,” said chair Suzy Stutzman, “would be in the Golden area because many of the clients come from there...” “There are no hard feelings about having to relocate,” said founder Ted Rains. They had an agreement with Marin Marietta to use the space rent-free. “It’s not a surprise to us,” Rains said. “We saw this coming about a year ago.” Long-time volunteer Scott Perrin said, “we’re happy to have been here and have use of the space, but now we have a huge challenge to find a new home.”



Temporary shop in shipping containers

The Golden Optimists Bicycle Recycle Program did extensive outreach into the community and got continuing local press coverage about the problem. The program found a temporary home in the parking lot of Golden Real Estate on South Golden Road. Two twenty-foot shipping containers were rented and delivered. One was fitted with an elaborate overhead system of hooks for hanging and storing bicycles. The other was furnished with shelving for supplies, a narrow workbench, and three rolling tool carts. When the shop was open, volunteers would roll the carts down the ramp, set up a

shade structure, and set up folding bike repair stands and conduct business. This highly visible location brought in new customers, but was a challenging for volunteers to work in extreme weather. The board of directors began an active site search for a more permanent home and sought ideas from a class of Colorado School of Mines students and some graduate students at Regis University.

At this time major bike sources were local police departments (about 680), surplus bikes had to be hauled away a few times a year by other programs and the total number of bikes

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repaired and returned to use was around 460. The program received a 2015 City of Golden Sustainability Award for its contributions to recycling and encouraging bicycling. With a grant from the Golden Civic Foundation, GOBRP purchased an aluminum trailer for hauling bikes. While many bikes continued to be provided for free to drop-ins, families, referrals, veterans, senior programs, and refugees, other bikes began to be sold both to generate revenue and to increase appreciation of the value of repaired bikes to their recipients. Now that the bicycle recycle program was a separate entity from the Breakfast Club, additional fundraising strategies were employed to fund parts, insurance, helmets, and prepare for a more permanent home.

The search for a more suitable home continued through the networks of the Golden community. Eventually a contact turned into a great solution. The principal of Connections Learning Center saw the opportunity of having this program on campus complement the direction of the school. She was developing an industrial arts program at this Jefferson County Middle School for at-risk students, as well as a service-learning program. A bike shop on campus could offer hands-on learning experiences as well as working with adults in the community providing service to others. The location was perfect for the bike program - accessible to greater Golden residents and near local transit. The principal worked with the GOBRP board of directors to get Jeffco Schools to allow the use and located a temporary classroom structure nearby that could be brought to the site. The bicycle recycle program raised the funds needed to move the structure (\$20,000) and set up shelving and work stands with tools (\$10,000) through a substantial grant from the City of Golden and other donations from the community. In addition to the normal bike shop function – volunteers fixing bikes, customers coming by for bikes – volunteers also began providing classes and mentoring students in the shop to learn about bike repair and service to others. This shop with lights and heat was a big improvement from the Quonset hut and shipping containers which contributed to an increase in volunteers. In 2016 nearly 800 bikes were donated with about 350 being repaired and returned to use. Although that number is significantly less than 2015, it was still a good accomplishment given the energy of volunteers that went into finding and moving to the new location.



Installing the new temp building at CLC



Working with students at CLC

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From 2017 to 2019 the Golden Optimists Bicycle Recycle Program continued with a pattern of getting some 800 donated bicycles each year and repairing 450 – 500 per year. The ever present problem of storage persisted. The bicycle program got a grant from the Golden Civic Foundation to help with the purchase of a TuffShed which was installed behind the bike shop. In addition to providing bikes to the local community at very affordable prices, about 1/3 of repaired bikes were given for free to kids Christmas programs, the Navajo Nation, school programs, and referrals.



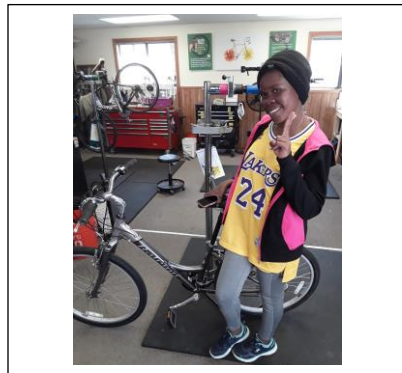
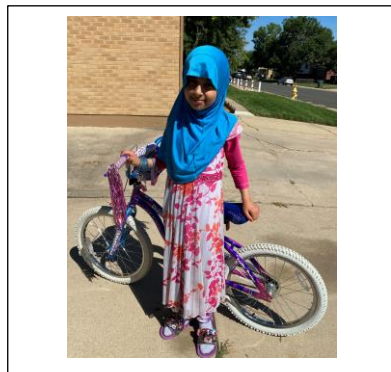
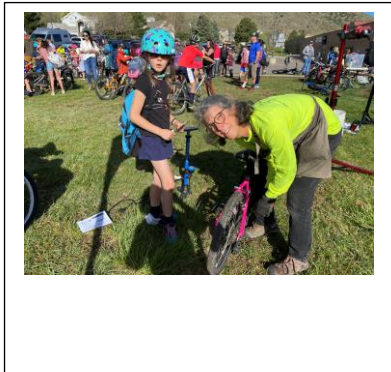
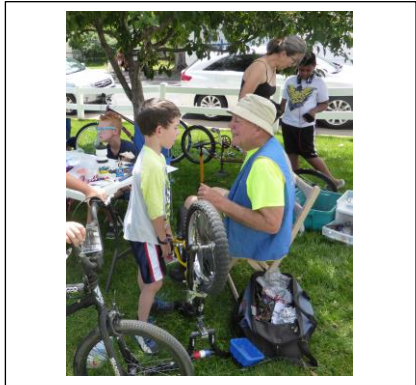
The bike shop and volunteers at 1200 Johnson Road

As in the community, country, and world, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 was a significant disruption to the shop. Starting in March, the bike shop was closed altogether for two months in compliance with the State of Colorado’s pandemic “Stay at Home” order. In early summer, bikes were provided to customers (and bike donations accepted) solely via appointments managed via email. This proved challenging because so many people wanted bikes: there was pent-up demand, people were looking for non-gym exercise alternatives, and there was a nation-wide shortage of new bicycles. In mid-summer, after the program’s leadership staff developed and implemented measures to minimize COVID-19 risk, the shop reopened with requirements for face masks and hand-washing, a strict limit of three staff in the shop at one time, and shop doors and windows open for ventilation. In early December, the program again suspended customer hours due to both a nation-wide COVID surge and the discomfort of working in cold temperatures with shop windows and doors open. Despite everything, the program largely met the unusually high 2020 demand for bikes. In fact, overall, the program provided 430 repaired bikes to customers in 2020, just slightly fewer than provided in 2019, impressive given the two-month closure. In all, approximately one-quarter of bicycles provided by the program were given away free to children and others who could not otherwise afford a bicycle. The

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remaining bikes were sold for modest prices to help pay for shop rent, insurance, parts, supplies, etc.

From 2021 through 2023 the Golden Optimists Bicycle Recycle Program continues to get donations of some 800 bikes per year, fixing about 450 – 500 for people who need them. Strategic planning identified a goal of ensuring that at least 50% of the bikes are given away for free. This goal has been met and exceeded in the following years – homeless, refugees, local kids Christmas programs, court referrals, mental health referrals, foster kids, school kids, and more. Free bike recipients also received helmets, locks, and in some cases repair kits and pumps. The workspace has been improved with better layout, work stands, and counterspace. The City of Golden provided a grant in 2023 for a large enclosed trailer to hold surplus bikes that are being redirected to other programs. The program attracted a list of some 30 volunteers with a variety of impressive experiences and skills that contribute to keeping this busy bike shop providing bikes for people who need them. The program continued to be involved in community service events like bike repair for pre-manufactured home developments and some schools, bike safety at bike-to-school days and bike rodeos, delivering to and repairing bikes at the Navajo Nation, programs with the adjacent Connections Learning Center students, and minor repairs and safety information at the Golden Bike Cruise.



Looking to the Future

For some 35 years the Golden Optimists (as they are known in the community) have been a reliable, ongoing source of bikes for people who need them for transportation, exercise, and fun. The greater Golden community has provided generous support through bicycle donations, grants, personal donations, and substantial volunteer time. There will be a need to adapt to changes in community needs and technology. The Golden Optimists Bicycle Recycle Program has its roots in serving the community with “Optimism” to help it rise to meet the future.