

West County Revolution Bike Shop



Local Bike Shop Offers Friendship And Community

By Jim Brumm

The atmosphere in the shop is electric, buzzing with activity and conversation. A long row of new bicycles, standing upright in frames on two levels, fills one side of the room. Customers mill around, asking questions, laughing. Some sit together on the couch at the rear of the store, talking about bikes, discussing the day.

Welcome to West County Revolution Bike Shop, the creation of Bradley Saul, his wife, Charity Kirk, and Steve Michel, three bicycling enthusiasts who feel that, especially today, riding bikes is indeed a revolutionary act.

Bradley Saul grew up in South Carolina, but found himself on a “western trajectory” early on, first stopping in Arizona, then on to Sonoma County. He started taking bikes and riding seriously at age 12 when he saw Greg Lamond, the first American winner of the Tour de France, race on television. “I went out and rode my bike around the cul-de-sac,” he said, laughing. “At age sixteen, everyone wanted a car; I wanted a bike.” Bradley started racing himself and “became hooked on it.”

Steve Michel is a local boy, born and raised in Santa Rosa. Though he left at age 20 to seek fame and fortune, he returned when he realized, “this is where I wanted to be.” His odyssey with bikes also started at age 12, when he parents “dragged him” to see the moving *Breaking Away*. “There was just something about the potential for bicycling to transport me out of my life,” he said. “I knew I had to ride my bike in Italy someday.” Steve did eventually go to Italy, participating in bike races there and fulfilling his dream.

Bradley and Steve met, naturally enough, through cycling. A mutual friend knew that Bradley wanted to open a bike shop, and that Steve had worked at bike shops for over 20 years. “Bradley’s vision and my experience were the perfect fit,” said Steve.

For Charity, bicycling is all about the environment. She’s a ardent proponent of using a bike to commute if at all possible, something she does herself, rain or shine. “It’s about reducing greenhouse gasses, but it’s also about keeping people healthy,” she said. “Riding bikes is so good for you.” When Bradley approached her with the idea of opening a bike shop, she thought it was a great idea. The two of them connected with Steve, and the rest is history.

“When I first came to Sebastopol I saw the potential for a good bike shop here,” said Bradley, “but I needed a good partner who knew the business.”

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The staff of West County Revolution Bike Shop in Sebastopol

West County Revolution Bike Shop was born. But it's more than just a place to buy a bike. "At other shops I've been to I always felt like I was compelled to buy something," said Bradley. "We wanted ours to be more than a bike shop. We wanted it to be like a clubhouse where people could mingle, find out about rides on our bulletin board, or just hang out and visit. We have a



couch so people can be comfortable just being here."

Bradley and Steve wanted to foster a sense of community and they have done just that, creating something that was sorely needed by Sonoma County and west county residents in particular. Whether you are a serious bike racer, or someone who just likes an easy ride downtown now and then, Bradley and Steve have the right bikes, the expertise, and most important of all, the time and genuine interest to help. "It helps when there's a community of like-minded people," said Charity. "It benefits everyone. All levels and interests are welcome."

The shop stocks a wide line of brands including Jamis, BMC, Redline, Trek and Cafee, plus everything else you may need to enhance your cycling such as helmets, clothing, parts, accessories and literature.

No matter what your level of bicycling, you are welcome at West County Revolution Bike Shop. If you are a racer; if biking is your life and you are looking for the top-of-the-line equipment, clothing and parts, they can help. But they understand that not everyone is a pro, that lots of people just like to ride on the weekends, on paved paths, for pleasure or exercise. At West County Revolution, they have bikes built for comfort and for fun. From retro-style one-speed cruisers, to geared bikes intended for easy riding on bike paths or

around town, with comfortable seats and wider tires, to sleek, high-tech, composite racing machines and everything in between, they've got the bike for you.

"I've worked in a lot of bike shops," said Steve. "At some shops if you're not already an expert it's almost like you have to go through a hazing process." He paused, and added, "Wouldn't it be nice if you could buy a bike without getting attitude? Here, if you're looking for an easy, comfortable bike, we don't try to tell you you're doing it wrong. We match the bike to the experience our customers are looking for. We don't *tell* our customers, we *listen* to their story. If you listen to learn what experience they're looking for, you'll know what they want."

The shop offers bicycle safety clinics, monthly classes on bike maintenance and basic repair, flat tire clinics and skills clinics for women. All free of charge.

Today, with gas prices at their highest levels in history, biking makes more sense than ever. Still the most effective human-powered method of locomotion ever invented, bicycles save money, improve health, reduce pollution, and create a closer sense of community. As Steve put it, "The art of bicycling is fun—clear and simple. We're excited about getting people to use bikes as transportation."

West County Revolution is one of just two bike shops in West Sonoma

County. So far, said Steve and Bradley, the most surprising thing about their business is that they doubled their business plan projections in the first year. Some customers followed Steve here from other bike shops. "It feels good," he said, "It's like we already have a following. Almost every day someone comes in here and says, 'I've been hearing great things about you guys.' We wanted to give the best customer service possible

and it looks like people are responding to that."

Bradley does the buying, shipping and receiving, administration, and scheduling. Steve ("Does as little as possible!") sells and works on bikes and oversees customer service. Charity helps manage and does graphics and advertising for the store. Together, along with their employees, they make a great team. As we spoke for this interview, they would interrupt each other in a friendly fashion, laughing and interjecting ideas and answers. It's obvious they love what they do and that they're good at it. Their enthusiasm is infectious.

Tired of high gas prices? Been thinking about getting a bike? Stop in to West County Revolution and talk to Steve and Bradley, or one of the other bike enthusiasts sure to be at the shop. West County Revolution is one of the few bike shops that is actually located right next to a paved bike path, so it's easy to try out different models to find the perfect bike for you.

Maybe it's time to leave your car in the garage and experience the freedom—the community—of bicycling. Join the fun; join the revolution.

West County Revolution Bike Shop is located at 6731 Sebastopol Avenue, Suite 130, Sebastopol, CA 95472. You can reach them at 707-829-2192 or visit their Web site at www.westcountyrevolution.com.