

REPAIR & RENEW



Elijah Belz, a rising sophomore at Cedar Ridge, stands with his father, Aaron Belz, in what will be Hillsborough Bicycle, a repair shop the duo is in the process of bringing off the ground. They rented a space behind Dual Supply, 115 W. King St., and hope to be open for business in the next few weeks.

ERIN WILTGEN / NEWS OF ORANGE

Teen and his father start bike repair shop

BY ERIN WILTGEN

News of Orange staff writer
e.wiltgen@newsfororange.com

The 1959 Raleigh bicycle lay forgotten in a barn outside Elijah Belz's aunt's house. Something about the almost forlorn bike called to the teenager, who decided to try his hand at taking it apart and putting it back together again.

Though his attempts failed, Elijah's quest to make the broken whole led him to the Durham Bike Co-op, where his stint as a volunteer nurtured his growing passion for bicycles.

"I had a bike that I took apart and couldn't get back together, so I visited the Durham Bike Co-op and have been volunteering there since, pretty much twice a week for two hours each time," he said. "So [I've] just gotten a lot of time in there and picked up everything I knew there. ... I liked volunteering at the co-op, and I liked the people there. I felt like I fit in."

Now, a year and a half later, the rising Cedar Ridge sophomore has decided to venture out on his own.

Hillsborough Bicycle—a repair shop the teenager started with his dad, Aaron, in a rented room behind Dual Supply Shop—

started from an Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign, has marched steadily from concept to reality.

The father-son pair first tested their idea by having Elijah build a bike for his dad to ride in the 500-mile RAGBRAI race across Iowa. The teen took a basic Nashbar frame and worked from there.

"Elijah's pretty independent," Aaron Belz said. "We went on the annual bike ride across Iowa, which is called RAGBRAI, last summer. This seemed like a much smaller challenge because that was like a 500-mile ride in a week, and I wasn't in shape. I hadn't ridden in five years. But Elijah built a bike that I could ride, and I thought the test would be to try to ride it on a long tour.

"And it was great. It was really great. ... I've been taking him to the Durham Bike Co-op for more than a year. He's got good enough skills that it seemed like a good opportunity to do something this summer."

First, the duo needed a business plan. Aaron Belz worked to set up a website and advertised on Twitter for a volunteer to design a logo. A taker from New York not only came up with a prototype but also

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Elijah Belz, a rising sophomore at Cedar Ridge, shows his dad, Aaron Belz, a bike frame in the rented room behind Dual Supply that will soon be Hillsborough Bicycle, a repair shop the two decided to start together. Elijah said he can do most any repair work except for welding.

BIKE

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

helped Hillsborough Bicycle set up Facebook and Twitter accounts with the same brand.

In the business plan, Aaron Belz projected startup costs for a rent deposit, inventory of supplies, tools and modest furnishings to total about \$3,700. With \$500 in donations from friends already in the bank and no capital of their own, the team set up an Indiegogo for \$2,500. Not long after, Elijah revised it to \$3,500, and within a week the fledgling shop had \$3,600 in funds.

"So our contributions were really surprising, and they came quickly," Aaron Belz said. "A lot of \$100, a lot of \$50."

The next step is to get a tax identification number as a corporation to set up a bank account and then begin looking for a wholesaler, something that might be tricky given the size of their business.

But despite the potential challenges, both father and son are feeling optimistic. Aaron Belz said they've had a lot of feedback from the community, including a call from someone asking to rent a mountain bike.

"That's not really our business, but at least people are using our number," he said, adding they handed out fliers during Last Fridays. "There's lots of interest, and that's something

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Hillsborough Bicycle, a new repair shop opening in the space behind Dual Supply, 115 W. King St., offers several services. Basics include fixing a flat tire, adjusting cables or brakes, overhauling bearings and replacing spokes. The company also does tune-ups from cleaning frames and brakes to putting in new cables.

"It seems like anything that a casual bike owner would have, derailment problems, chains, normal tune-ups, wheels," said Aaron Belz, who started the business with his son, Elijah. "Part of our tool kit is going to be a wheel truing stand, so we'll be able to do just about everything for the normal bike owner."

For more information, go to hillsboroughbicycle.com.

that's encouraging; the funding and the interest. ... Many of them had already heard of it because the shops in Carrboro, Chapel Hill and Durham had posted things on their Facebooks or their actual physical walls."

Moving forward, Elijah said he hopes to continue working with bikes, expanding this business and perhaps eventually moving onto something new.

"They don't have attitudes," he said of why he liked working with bicycles. "I just like the technology. It's pretty much the ideal combination of complex but not too complex. There's no engine. It's human power. It's green. I like that aspect."

"... I definitely plan to work on bikes my entire life but not necessarily here, and I would eventually like to get into building frames."

Whatever shape Hillsborough Bicycle takes as it moves forward, however, the structure will remain the same: to take something broken

and make it whole.

And the Belz family has a history in that sort of thing. Aaron Belz said when Elijah was only around 2 years old, they would stroll down the alleys of St. Louis to find hidden treasures, or, later on, rummage through the Dumpsters at Duke University after graduation to find the student throw-aways.

"I think we're both kind of bothered by the fact that so much stuff goes unrepaired and unused," he said. "There's an ethical side to this. We're not really big green people. We recycle and everything, but we're not advocates particularly. But there's this kind of sense of needing to be better stewards to the world around us that I'm pretty sure that's part of why Elijah was attracted to fixing up old bikes."

"To see something that doesn't work and make it work again, there's a really deep satisfaction in that. I gave no thought at all to repair and renew as our little slogan, but it's totally right to how we feel."

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