

Exchange Aims at Providing Bikes for Cannery Workers

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

A handful of volunteers gathered at the Kodiak Baptist Mission Heritage Center on Saturday for a community bike exchange. Kodiak Island Trails Network, along with several other local charities and churches partnered to collect used bikes all day, with the hopes of fixing them up and providing them to cannery workers at reasonably low prices.

Sandra West was one of Saturday's volunteers and said they hoped to get stuff in, fixed and out within the day so they wouldn't have to store bikes anywhere.

"So the idea is to collect them in the morning and then we've got some great bike mechanics that are going to come work on them and make sure that we can get them greased and air in them and we've got a lot of reflectors because we know when cannery workers are going to work, it's dark. So we're going to teach them the basic rules of the road, we've had people from other countries coming and one of the most common bike car accidents is bikers riding on the wrong side of the road."

West said there was a recent influx of about 80 foreign workers, many with refugee status, that are currently employed at Westward Seafoods. She said many have struggled to find housing that is near the canneries, and many are living miles away from work and the grocery stores.

"The canneries will pick up workers but sometimes the workers need to get to the food bank or they need to go to the grocery store — other places than just work and home. Bicycle is the most efficient means."

Over the course of the day, West said they collected about nine bikes, and volunteers came in to work on the bikes and make sure they were in proper shape and safe to ride. Then, in the afternoon, cannery workers came and chose bikes, paid a small fee and were taught rules of the road to make sure they would be able to travel safely. West said they worked specifically with Westward Seafoods to identify workers that already knew how to ride a bike and wanted one to use while they were in town.

"I'd like everybody who wants a bike to have a bike. But we're a one day operation, today. We're going to use that money today to buy tubes, brake cables, grease, so it's all going to go back in. We don't expect to make any money. We might lose money, but it's ok to give."

She said the goal is to buy the bikes back from the workers if and when they leave the island, and hold similar bike drives in the future.

Overall, West said cannery workers are by far the biggest bicycle population on the island, so it makes sense to have drives and safety

workshops for them periodically.

“They ride to work, and if they don’t have bikes, they walk. It’s easier to bike.”

West said 58 Degrees North also helped provide tools and equipment for the drive. She said she’s pleased with the community turn out and grateful for all the bikes that were donated to the drive.