

The Mercury News

Around Town: Bicycle Express, a downtown San Jose gem, turning 30

By Sal Pizarro | December 16, 2017

When I heard that [Bicycle Express](#), the beloved, family-owned bike shop near San Jose State, would be celebrating its 30th anniversary next month, my first thought was that it had to be off by a decade or two. When I was at SJSU in the early '90s, the shop already felt like an institution that had been around forever.

The small shop on East William Street, with bikes locked out front and tires hanging from the ceiling, is a real neighborhood gem. Trends have come and gone over the years, but Bicycle Express owners **Karen** and **Chuck Clifford** have managed to ride them all. The shop will celebrate its 30th anniversary started next month with commemorative T-shirts and customer appreciation days, including a hot dog cookout. Chuck Clifford has a simple philosophy on the shop's longevity: "When it gets tough, stick with it," he said. "It eventually gets better."

Mountain bikes were big for a while, Karen Clifford said, and now road bikes are back to being all the rage. "We like to say around here that everything old becomes new again," she said. "We've adjusted to every different change that happens."

The store's history actually stretches back a bit farther than January 1988, when Bicycle Express came into existence. Chuck Clifford and his dad, Charlie, previously co-owned the store, which was known as C&C Bicycles. And before that, starting in the 1970s, it had been the original location of Shaw's Lightweight Bicycles before **Terry Shaw** moved his shop to Santa Clara in 1983.

Downtown San Jose and the SJSU campus weren't particularly bike friendly when the store opened. But the new emphasis on bike culture has pointed things in the right direction. And you'd think that today's Millennial generation — which seems to champion all things local — would really appreciate a true mom-and-pop downtown business.

The Cliffords were early supporters of Turning Wheels For Kids, the effort to put bikes in the hands of low-income kids. When organizers approached Bicycle Express about purchasing bikes for the annual bike build, Clifford decided to forgo profit and put them in touch with the distributors to reduce the nonprofit's expenses. Bicycle Express also has assembled and stored bikes that the San Jose Police Department has given away to kids over the years.

There are customers who travel from as far away as Manteca and Salinas and others who came in as kids and now bring their own kids into the shop. "If it weren't for our customers, we wouldn't be able to celebrate," Karen Clifford said. "We hope we can do another 30 years."

Tony Saavedra is one of those longtime customers. He remembers first coming to C&C Bicycles with his friends when he was in the sixth grade and lived nearby on South 18th Street. "We'd spend the money

we earned mowing lawns to buy parts for our BMX bikes,” Saavedra said. He’s 46 now and still comes in, even though he lives in Gilroy. “There are tons of people like me. Everybody around here knows about Bicycle Express.”

SJSU CELEBRATES HANUKKAH: San Jose State’s Chabad Student Center, along with other Jewish campus organizations, celebrated the beginning of Hannukah with a menorah lighting,

traditional donuts and potato latkes. Rabbi **Shaya Bernstein**, co-director of the Chabad Student Center, says that to the best of his knowledge, it was the first ever public menorah lighting on campus.

Provost **Andy Feinstein** addressed the group of about 50 students and faculty who attended and lit the first candle on the menorah, with another being lit each night of the “festival of lights.” “The message being to add a little bit more light and goodness every day,” Rabbi Bernstein said.

SAVING MILPITAS HISTORY: Congratulations to **Steve Munzel** and **Don Peoples**, leaders of the Milpitas Community Museum effort. They got the green light last month from the successor agency of the Milpitas redevelopment agency to purchase a 1.6-acre lot next to the library on Main Street. That will be the future home of a museum celebrating the city’s history and public park.

The group celebrated the win Dec. 7 with a reception at Zahir’s Bistro. While planning for the park and museum is in the very early stages, you can dip into Milpitas’ past at the Milpitas Community Museum website, www.milpitashistory.org/home.

THE FORCE IS WITH THEM: The “Star Wars” fans who saw the 6 p.m. show of “The Last Jedi” on Friday night at the Los Gatos Theatre didn’t just get to see what will probably turn out to be the year’s biggest hit, they also got to do a lot of good for families at the Ronald McDonald House at Stanford. Led by President **Suzanne Boxer-Gassman**, the Rotary Club of Los Gatos, made arrangements to buy out all 214 seats. They re-sold the tickets as a fundraiser for the recently expanded facility next to Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital where families can stay while their children are receiving treatment. The ticket buyers gathered for a pre-show celebration at Gardino’s. Six of the tickets were held back for a family staying at the House, who really got an out of this world treat.

GOOD DEED DEPT.: Lexus of Stevens Creek, the Santa Clara Rotary Club and Family Giving Tree teamed up to put smiles on the faces of 167 kids from five Santa Clara elementary schools Thursday with its annual Christmas 4 Kids celebration at the Stevens Creek Boulevard car dealership. Students got to shop for gifts for loved ones at the Mrs. Claus General Store, and Santa himself stopped by to give each child a gift and a warm coat.

The pediatric patients at Kaiser Permanente in Santa Clara also got a dose of holiday cheer as “Santa” Snoopy, Lucy and other characters from Winterfest at California’s Great America paid a house call to the hospital Tuesday.