

Charlton church organizing bike collection

BIKES

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tronics collection at the Federated Church for March 16. "When you think about it, there's so much waste. I collect scrap metal and go to scrap yards, and I count 20 usable bikes there. It's a crying shame."

While such bikes might get \$2 in scrap value, they can help a person in Ghana or Tanzania get to work, school, market or the doctor four times faster than walking and help them carry more stuff home. Those are the two countries Wood's collection sends to, although he also gives some to local city kids.

It's hard to find any data

regarding the availability of bikes in either country, but NationMaster.com has some for vehicles per square kilometer. Ghana has 0.66; Tanzania, just 0.16 - while the U.S. has 46.5. In other words, the number of cars in both countries combined constitute rush hour for one of our major cities, while we have nearly 125 million more cars than people, based on a quick calculation using the country's land area.

"They're not looking for Treks [a high-end brand]," Wood said. "They're looking for 'grow out of it and don't know what to do with it' bikes. They just need transportation."

He's far from the only one

collecting bikes this way. Google "bikes for Ghana" and a long list of similar efforts pop up, topped by a group in Seattle called the Village Bicycle Project, which has affiliates across the country, including Bikes Not Bombs in Boston. Their website claims they've shipped 60,000 bikes to Ghana and Sierra Leone since 1999 as well as trained tens of thousands of people there in bike maintenance and use.

"Improved mobility is a key to reducing poverty," the site states. "In Africa, a bicycle can take a person from poverty to prosperity."

The group uses a training philosophy almost anyone will recognize, and states it as

part of their one-day classes people must take to get a bike: "If you give someone a bicycle today tomorrow when it spoils, the person will come back to you for another bicycle," the site states. "But if you teach someone to repair, when the bicycle spoils they will know what to do to fix the problem."

"The bike thing is my passion," Wood said, noting he's been doing it about two years. "I'd like to take credit for thinking of it, but it really was the Africans who approached me."

Specifically, he said, people in Worcester's Ghanaian community proposed it, and he coordinates the collections and shipments to Africa

through them, via staff at the city's Mt. Carmel Church. He's also collecting sewing machines to send there.

His contact there could not be reached late Tuesday afternoon.

The bikes go by giant shipping container 600 at a time, costing about \$10 each, he said. That, of course, just gets them to Ghana's coastal ports; transporting them inland (his team supplies the northern part of the country) takes more funds and effort, especially since about two-thirds of Ghana's roads aren't paved.

Presently, the effort is de facto volunteer; although he claims he "would like to start a non-profit at some point."

He does it alongside his regular business, which recycles electronics (by sending them to a facility in Brockton) and other things, called Green Day Recycling. (He noted he wanted it to be easily remembered, and admits he named it after the rock band became famous, although his firm is not listed on the state's corporate database.)

That side of the business will also be present on the 16th. Rev. James Chase said Wood is essentially "renting our parking lot" for the day, as he did for a similar event last October.

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Radiothon putting out the call for help in feeding hungry

FOOD

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on Radiothon day to contribute small amounts - \$10, \$25, \$50. Last year, he got less than three, although the effort still collected around \$32,000 because of increased corporate donations, he said.

"I've got to wonder how many of our seniors are saying 'I can't donate. I've got to go there,'" Fournier said, noting the number of single people - who are mostly seniors - seeking help jumped from 444 to 610 between 2011 and 2012. "I don't see it getting any better, especially with the sequester."

Indeed, U.S. Rep. John Tierney D-Salem, was quoted in the Newburyport News March 2 as saying senior centers and the Meals on Wheels program will be among the first to be hit by sequestration cuts, losing about 5 percent of their funding nationally. To him, "It's not going to hit like a heart attack, more like heart disease."

The story can be found online at <http://www.newburyportnews.com/local/x1874095104/Tierney-Sequester-cuts-to-hit-elderly-first/print>.

According to the federal Office of Management and Budget's 224-page "transparency" report on sequestration, available at the White House website, most "discretionary" non-defense programs face an 8.2 percent cut, while "mandatory" ones are getting a 7.6 percent cut.

"Unless you're at this end, where you're servicing them, you don't really see the need" such cuts create, Fournier said.

He noted the pantry needs to collect "a minimum of \$30,000 walking out of the station" March 28, between donations made that day and earlier. That's a lot more than he once needed: Fournier recalled collecting \$10,000 "and thinking 'Cha-ching!' We've made it for the year. Those days are long gone."

To help address that need, he poses a challenge to local high school students. In the past, he said, groups from Southbridge, Shepherd Hill and Tantasqua all ran collection drives "and would bury the station with trunks full of food." It hasn't happened for a couple of years, but he wants to see that again this year, and have the students "come in and tout [their] own horn" on the air.

"If every kid [in a school] brought in one can, that's half a ton [or more] of food," he said. "That's thousands of dollars we don't have to spend."

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Joslin/Barton camp to hold annual walk

WALK

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same thing as me."

Jonathan agreed with his sister about feeling like any other kid at the camp. He said they both have walked in the St. Patrick's Day event for several years, simply because they love the camp so much.

"I know I am in safe hands there," said Jonathan. "The staff are very well-trained and know what they are doing."

Jonathan said this was made clear during one of the many safety drills he and the other campers took part in last summer, when a counselor had a seizure while in the water.

"The nurses took care of [him] quickly," said Jonathan. "It was a little scary,

because we knew something was happening, but they tried to keep everyone out of the way and calm."

Jordan said she is ready to take part in this year's race, as she had to sit last year's event out. While she'll be walking the course, Jordan said she is "honored" to have the spouse of Webster Middle School teacher Patty Cormier run the race in her name.

The pair's mother, Valerie Beals, said she is just as in love with the camps as her kids are. She said the family has been utilizing their services for the past decade. She said they have taken a lot of knowledge away from the many family weekends they have attend.

"We went to a couple of family weekends when they were younger," said

Beals. "You do a lot of stuff together, but then the kids go off and do their own thing and the parents are able to talk. I think Barton is awesome. I know my kids are safe."

She and the kids agreed that having a long-term illness like diabetes teaches anyone more responsibility, not only with their own bodies, but also in caring for others.

Valerie said she knows of adults who couldn't handle the day-to-day demands that diabetes brings her kids. She said she credits Barton/Joslin for helping them grow and learn.

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Charlton man faces indecent assault charges

ASSAULT

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At one point, "he told the victim not to tell his daughter or wife," he stated.

Shortly, though, "an opportunity arose, and she went upstairs, awoke her friend, and told her she had to leave the residence right now" before driving home to Auburn. Once there, the girl e-mailed Merdaa's wife to tell her, then reported it to Auburn Police, who sent her to Charlton Police because the incident had allegedly occurred there, Dowd wrote.

Police obtained an emergency restraining order rapidly, but the officer trying to serve it at Merdaa's home "was told he was not residing there ... due to this incident." He was later found and served at work in Boston, Dowd wrote.

Law enforcement data shows that the majority of

sexual assaults of various kinds are committed by a perpetrator who knows the victim in some way. Although a lot of the research refers to rape, nobody is alleging that serious a crime in this case, and Merdaa is innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

"The literature suggests that a preponderance of rapes are committed by individuals who are known

to the victim or with whom they have had some prior relationship," states a 2001 report entitled "Successfully Investigating Acquaintance Sexual Assault," available online at www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/acquaintance/participant.html#dp38336304. "Many of these rapes are sexual assaults by friends, acquaintances, co-workers, associates, and even relatives. As a matter of fact, such affiliations often create additional problems for the victim because she must continue to face her assailant (as well as

mutual friends) throughout the ordeal of the investigation and any subsequent legal proceedings."

In the Merdaa case, for example, the court file notes that the victim's mother allegedly reported contact from Merdaa's daughter "to stop this matter from proceeding," but Dowd wrote that he did not know whether it was "being done at the bequest of the suspect."

The 2001 paper looks at the difficulties police often have investigating sexual cases that don't fit various stereotypes of what is the victim, assailant, location or other factors "should" be. As researcher Kimberly Lonsway observed in a section on the dynamics of sexual assault, "most sexual assault investigators would report that the case they handled most recently did not resemble the stereotype."

Historically, she wrote, the stereotype exists in part because such traits "used to more accurately reflect the

characteristics of reported rape," but that has changed greatly over time. Back in the early 1970s, about 80 percent of the reported cases were committed by strangers in San Diego, but by 1992, 80 percent of the reported assailants were known to the victims.

A wide range of misconceptions "about appropriate behavior for men and women in sexual situations make sexual assault more likely to occur," Lonsway wrote. "They tell us that men will be aggressive sexually and that women will resist or resist - but that this is all 'part of the game' and should not be taken seriously."

If convicted, Merdaa could face up to five years in prison or 2.5 years in jail on each count. His next date in court is April 11.

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