

BIKE SHOPS

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Bicycles, especially in the \$200 to \$300 range, are popular with consumers looking for an alternative to high gasoline prices.

money," he said, while attaching an electric motor to a bike. It belonged to a retired Port Charlotte man who said he would use it to ride around the neighborhood, or "go get a cup of coffee at McDonalds."

The 18-pound motors which cost \$599 to install are made at the Electric Bike Factory, the home of 75 year-old Fort Myers resident Mort Lashman. He sold over 400 of the motors to bike shop owners nationwide this year, in one of his hottest sales rushes since he started making them in 1998.

"It started off slow in January and February, but all of a sudden it took off like gangbusters," he said.

He claims not to have had even one break down in a decade.

"We have a deal that if there's any problem it's my wife's fault, because we don't make mistakes," he said.

Fort Myers Cyclery owner Michael Holm also noted a 20 percent increase in sales at his bicycle shop in the last two months, much of it repair work on used bikes. Although some new ones that start out in the mid-\$200 to low-\$300 dollar price range have also been popular.

"We are getting people in that have made comments that they are buying a bike to commute," Holm said. "And probably more so than people who are buying bikes for recreation."

Holm regularly commutes to work over the Midpoint Bridge and has observed more new bikers doing the same, on bike lanes and sidewalks. Some of those new cyclists, who might be rusty on the rules of the road, have led to increased safety concerns, as well as debate over how well Lee County takes care of its cycling population.

"There is a problem with education of the cyclists and the motorists that don't know bicycles really do have the rights of the road and they don't belong on the sidewalk," said Dan Moser, who writes a cycling column for Florida Weekly and is Chairman of the Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee. "Every day when I'm on the road (bicycling) at least one person yells or beeps at me to get on the sidewalk."

Moser said the County has been sluggish in its efforts to keep track of the number of cyclists on the road, and accommodate them with proper bike lanes.

Lee County is, at the very least, putting in paved shoulders on most new roads - but Moser argued those should-

ders are many times used by motorists who break down or need extra room to make a turn. It's also a place where debris like blown out tires tends to be pushed.

"(Lee County Department of Transportation) is sticking their head in the sand and in my opinion coming up with some lame reasons not to accommodate a whole mode of travel," he said.

Moser did admit that actually keeping track of the number of cyclists on the roads "is a trick, but there are ways to estimate it."

Andy Getch, an engineering manager for Lee DOT, agreed the concerns are valid.

He also commutes to work by cycle, he said for health reasons.

"For years I wouldn't see very many cyclists on the 20 to 30 minute ride in, and that typically didn't look like someone who was commuting to work," he said. "Lately in the last two or three years, I've seen people who had a briefcase or a bag or someone who looked like they were riding for a student type purpose. So there are more people doing it; I hesitate to say a lot more."

Lee County roads haven't traditionally been built with cyclists in mind, he added.

"Most of the roadways, neighborhoods and communities in the County were (originally) built without any or with very little bicycle and pedestrian facilities," he said. "As we build new roadways, the County has been including bicycle and pedestrian facilities on the roadways."

But some new roads, being built now, were already planned before the newer standards were put in place.

Getch described two different standards for roadways - the State's, which is friendlier to cyclists and the County's, not always as friendly.

"(Bicycles) have always been considered vehicles and permitted to ride on the road," he said. "But there's never been any attempt to have more of an area for them until recently."

Debbie Tower, a spokesperson for the Florida Department of Transportation, said the state follows each individual county's lead in building roads that accommodate cyclists, whether that means only adding paved shoulders, or well-marked bike lanes.

"When Florida DOT builds improvements for state highways, it's very typical for us to add shoulders, or bike lanes," she said. "If you work in down-



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTOS EVAN WILLIAMS

Repair work on used bikes is keeping bike shop owners very busy these days.

town Fort Myers, or downtown Naples or places where sidewalks do connect you, short walks or short bicycle trips to do errands are very possible. We encourage that, and we also encourage people to ride and walk safely."

Moser added to be sure and buy your bicycle from a reputable dealer.

"You do pay a little more but you get what you pay for," he said. "The assembly is vital...that's why I think: bite the bullet, go to a bike store and get it done right." ■

FURNITURE

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outside.

The Naples showroom is located at 14250 Tamiami Trail and features a wide variety of Modern, Traditional, Tropical, Coastal and Transitional Bedrooms, Dining Rooms, Living Rooms and an extensive Youth Line. The showroom also includes a variety of finely crafted area rugs and accent pillows magnificently displayed in a Rug and Textile Gallery as well as a 3,700 square foot Mattress Gallery featuring Sealy, Simmons, Serta & Tempur-Pedic mattresses.

Also featured in the new showroom is the "The Academy of Design" which offers affordable interior design services using City Furniture's wide selection of home furnishings. A licensed designer will assist in everything from room layouts to selection of paint colors.

As part of its introduction to the Southwest Florida community, City Furniture has partnered with The Ronald McDonald House to provide newly furnished bedrooms to the families that reside in the temporary housing facility.

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—Bizwire and Florida Weekly staff report

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