

Driven to succeed: 16-year-old Rwandan refugee finds passion in repairing bikes



Staff photo by Adam Urquhart Faustin Dushimimana is relatively new to the United States, and in his roughly three years of being in the country, he has acquired quite a lot of skills in the realm of bicycle repairs. After seeing a bicycle for the first time in his life in the U.S. his passion for this mode of transportation propelled him to landing a job at Goodale's Bike Shop in Nashua. With concentrated eyes locked on the job before him, Dushimimana tweaks on the handlebars of a bike he's repairing at Goodale's.

NASHUA — After being born in a refugee camp in Rwanda, Faustin Dushimimana made his way to the U.S. with his family and is now working toward building a bright future for himself repairing bicycles.

Dushimimana, 16, spent 13 years in that camp after his parents fled war. His parents were born in Zaire, now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and resettled into the camp to escape war in their home country.

Dushimimana said eventually a company came to the camp where he and his family were living to give them the opportunity to get out — and they did. He and the majority of his brothers and sisters now live in the U.S. After arriving in 2015, he saw many new things for the first time, including bicycles.

“It was good to come over here because it’s a whole different thing from my country to here,” Dushimimana said. *“I love to fix bikes because I never got that opportunity back in the refugee camp.”*

He said when he came to America, he saw bikes and wanted to get involved with them. His passion for this mode of transportation took off once his bike broke. Without knowing much about how to repair his bike, he said he figured out some of the issues on his own. However, he ended up taking his tools and bike over to the Gate City Bike Co-op after a friend told him about the program at school. Dushimimana attends to Nashua High School South.

John Burkitt, co-founder and head mechanic at the Gate City Bike Co-op, said when Dushimimana came to the facility at 35 Spring St., his tool set did not include bike-specific tools. However, he did come with a drive to learn.

“He wants to be the guy that succeeds and he’ll pick up the skills and do what he needs to do,” Burkitt said.

Burkitt described him as being *“absolutely dedicated”* and *“very willing.”*

Dushimimana will stay all the way through the hours of operation at the co-op, absorbing as much knowledge and experience as he can. After grasping the intricacies of repairing bikes at the co-op, Dushimimana made his way to Goodale’s Bike Shop, where he worked full-time during the summer. He continues to work, along with attending school, volunteering at the co-op and at the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Nashua. Dushimimana said now that he is in school, he works at Goodale’s Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday.

“Don and John Burkitt, those two gentlemen wrote letters of recommendation to me here at Goodale’s and then we contacted Faustin and sat down and interviewed him and gave him a shot per their recommendation,” Goodale’s Vice President Ron Bingham said. *“I could use 10 more of him.”*

Bingham said Dushimimana worked as a bike service mechanic during the summer with them. With the season starting to wind down now, unless repair work continues coming in, he will be cross-trained to build new bikes. He said Dushimimana has an excellent work ethic and is very prompt to work on time.

“He’s concerned about doing a very good job, the best job he can do,” Bingham said. “He’s never afraid to ask for help and wants to put out a quality product.”

Bingham said Dushimimana is now able to go back to the co-op and help repair bikes there after working through the summer at Goodale’s. He has learned very well on the models from the 1960s, 70s and 80s. He takes the fundamentals of those bikes and applying them to the newer, more technical bikes of today. Dushimimana said when he came to Goodale’s, he saw things he had never seen before and was able to learn more.

“If you don’t have the right teacher mentoring you, then they’re not able to put product out correctly or make repairs,” Bingham said. “In this case here, we’re passing the knowledge on to him and he’s taking that knowledge back and helping expand that knowledge base back into the bike co-op.”

While learning something new with every shift worked at Goodale’s, Dushimimana said he just enjoys fixing bikes and learning more, and that his coworkers are really nice and helpful. In peak season for business during the summer, Goodale’s employs roughly 40 people. However, Dushimimana will remain on staff through the winter, getting hours and continuing to learn as a result of his proven work ethic. Moreover, with a busy schedule to maintain, Dushimimana either works or volunteers six days a week.

“He’s showing me a few things, which has been very helpful,” Burkitt said. “The bikes we get at the co-op tend to be mostly mountain bikes and mostly older bikes, so, he’s picking up skills with the newer stuff over at Goodale’s.”

Burkitt said Dushimimana wants to be successful and make something of himself, while giving back to the community, which he does even further by volunteering at the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Nashua. Dushimimana, a black belt, teaches karate during the week.

“We’ve just been really proud of him,” Burkitt said. “What a story of the American dream.”

Additionally, Bingham is also proud of him for passing his driver’s test during the summer and achieving a new mode of transportation, a car. Although he continues to use bikes as a way of getting around, he now has another accomplishment with purchasing a vehicle.

So, whether pedalling a bike, or sitting behind the wheel of a car, many who work alongside Dushimimana will agree that his drive to learn new skills will take him far in life.