

Two Wheeled Passion

Written by Mark Shaffer

Wednesday, 12 September 2012 08:43 - Last Updated Wednesday, 12 September 2012 09:15



Lowcountry Bicycles Celebrates 25 Years in Beaufort

“I thought of that while riding my bicycle.”

- Albert Einstein, on the Theory of Relativity

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I'm sitting at the bar at Emily's Restaurant in Beaufort trying to conjure up a vision. Now, the people who know me will not find this at all unusual – sitting at this bar, that is. The conjuring of the vision is a bit different: I'm trying to imagine what this room looked like a quarter century ago *sans* bar and filled to bursting with bicycles from floor to ceiling.

John and Jenni Feeser were new to Beaufort by way of the upstate where John ran a cycle shop until



he “got the crazy idea to start my own.” The young couple knew they wanted to be on the coast and Beaufort seemed ideal with loads of possibility.

“We thought at that time that Beaufort would turn into a college town,” says John.

“We’re still working on that.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Back in the late 1980's the Feesers were optimistic that USCB would bring in the student business. The town had the potential to grow into a micro-Charleston. And there was also plenty

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of space available on the cheap.

“It had such a great downtown area that just seemed to be the place for the shop,” John recalls. “They didn’t think a whole lot of the real estate back then because there was a lot of it and nobody to rent it or buy it.” He laughs at the memory.

The Feesers put together a plan and became the first clients for the town’s brand new Small Business Coordinator. Then came the fun part. “Going to the banks for the loan,” says John. There’s still the trace of a grimace at the recollection. “Things were pretty tight back then.”



After a couple of rejections he stumbled upon the shop on Port Republic and walked into the bank across the street. The loan officer turned out to be a runner who loved the idea of a bicycle shop downtown. 25 years ago to the day of this publication date the Feesers opened the original Lowcountry Bicycles next to Emily’s on Port Republic. The shop opened just before the BMX craze flamed out. Half of the initial inventory was tied up in BMX. “We were lucky to make it to Christmas,” says John.

Back in the pre X-Box days kids still asked Santa for bikes (not so much these days). They

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made it to Christmas, then to spring and along the way the shop philosophy shifted to road bikes. At one point the tiny Port Republic shop was packed with four lines of cycles.

“You walked in and everything was hanging off the ceiling and off the walls,” laughs John. “Somebody would walk in completely over-stimulated by all the colors and stuff everywhere and ask for some little gadget and I’d say, ‘Oh yeah, that’s right over here.’ Nobody could find anything but me. That was fun.”

“We were pretty crammed in there,” says Jenni, “at least by the time we moved.”

Eventually the shop moved to a much larger space on Lady’s Island. The three of us lounge around the shop office surrounded by 25 years of photos and memorabilia on the walls. John and Jenni have raised two kids in the interim, and son Dylan grew up racing bikes and working in the shop. One of his old jerseys hangs on the back of the office door.

Twenty-five years is a lifetime in the world of small business and in a business heavily influenced by technology it might qualify as two. Or as John sums it up, “It’s been a rollercoaster.”

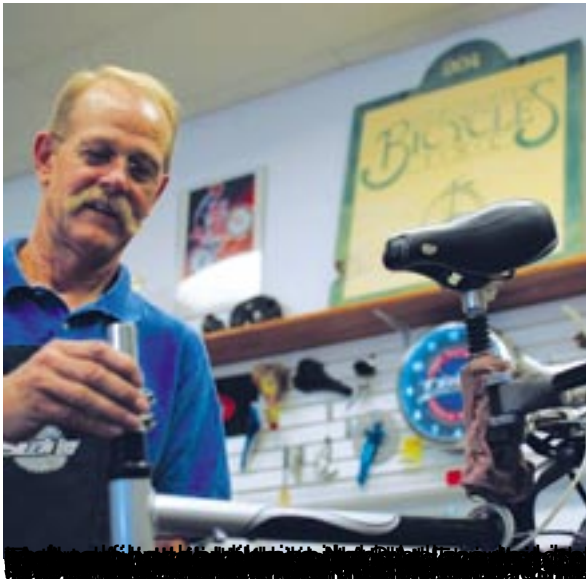
Part of the ride’s been spent keeping pace with the trends, the technology and the changing marketplace. Almost from the moment the doors opened on Port Republic, the cycling world began to change and evolve and it’s never stopped.

The “Real Steel” hand-built Euro-style frames of the 1970s gave way to aluminum in the ‘80s and

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Mark Shaffer is his favorite regional writer. Mark Shaffer is a 39-year-old, 5'10", 160-lb. man with a mustache, wearing a blue shirt, who lives in Beaufort, North Carolina. He is a avid cyclist and has been riding for over 20 years. He is a member of the local cycling club and has been riding with them for over 10 years. He is a avid cyclist and has been riding for over 20 years. He is a member of the local cycling club and has been riding with them for over 10 years.