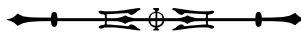




Vintage Dikes

are Enjoying the Afterlife in 'Bicycle Heaven'



Ben Avon's Craig Morrow's world-renowned shop, Bicycle Heaven, is one of Pittsburgh's best-kept secrets.

By Pamela Palongue

Bicycle Heaven has been rated #4 on TripAdvisor's list of things to do in Pittsburgh, beating out tourist heavyweights like Heinz Field and the Pittsburgh Zoo. So what exactly is Bicycle Heaven?

It's a bicycle museum and bike shop — but it also features antiques and artwork. To put it simply, owner and founder Craig Morrow says, "There's something here for everyone." Still, 80 percent of Morrow's visitors are from out of state and out of the country.

One major draw is the quality and quantity of rare vintage bikes. One model in particular, the Bowden Spacelander, is worth somewhere between \$8,000 and \$48,000. Originally designed in the 1940s, the first bike rolled off



the assembly line in 1960. It had an unusual rounded design, reflective of its name and was made of relatively fragile fiberglass parts. A fairly expensive price tag of \$89.50 resulted in only 544 bikes being made before production was halted. There are less than 40 of the originals still in existence today, and Bicycle Heaven has 17 on display.



Because of his extensive collection of vintage bikes, Morrow has

been sought after by Steven Spielberg to supply bikes for the feature film “Super 8.” Russell Crowe rode one of the museum’s bikes in the Academy Award-winning film “A Beautiful Mind,” and a subsequent film starring Crowe, “Fathers and Daughters,” also features some of the bikes. Dustin Hoffman has visited the bike museum and, at one point, Morrow was contacted by former astronaut John Glenn who was looking for a particular type of bike. There is even the possibility of a reality TV show for Bicycle Heaven in the not-too-distant future, which would make Morrow a celebrity in his own right, although nothing has been finalized at this point.

People are allowed to stroll through the museum free of charge, but donations are accepted and appreciated. Though voluntary, Morrow says about 8 out of 10 visitors leave a donation.



Bicycle Heaven also designs custom bikes and restores vintage bikes for customers, in addition to supplying hard-to-find vintage bicycle parts. The museum and business had its beginnings in Bellevue about 25 years ago when Morrow began collecting vintage bikes and parts. He would repair bikes and sell parts, and had over 3,000 bikes stored in various people’s garages around the neighborhood.

Now a resident of Ben Avon, Morrow opened the shop and museum in the Chateau area near Manchester about three-and-a-half years ago. Conveniently located along the North Shore Trail, many bike travelers stop by to look at the amazing collection.

“Almost everyone who comes in immediately begins to look for the bicycle they had as a kid,” says Morrow. “Everyone has a story about their bike.”

Morrow, too, has his own story. His favorite bike in the museum is a Schwinn Sting-Ray Orange Krate that represents his own childhood dream realized. While still in his youth, he was able to work and save up enough money to buy one of the coveted bikes, which was fairly expensive in its day.

“For me, my bike represented freedom. It was my first set of wheels,” says Morrow. With a bike, kids could begin to experience some independence by riding to the cinema for a Saturday afternoon movie or to the corner restaurant for an ice cream. The nostalgia of that first taste of freedom comes flooding back in the form of an Orange Krate bicycle for Morrow.

In the 9th grade, Morrow dropped out of school and never went back. He became interested in boxing, eventually won a Pittsburgh Golden Gloves title and went on to box as a local professional. But his love of old things at an early age led him to a career working in antiques.

“I’ve always loved old stuff. I would always be looking behind a fireplace mantle for old things,” explains Morrow.

When he purchased the building on Columbus Avenue, he didn’t even have to look behind a mantle to find treasure. He inherited some abandoned paintings from a local artist who was a contemporary of Andy Warhol, and had used part of the building as a studio. The artwork is now a part of

Bicycle Heaven’s Annual Bike Show, Swap Meet and Party!

June 11 – 12 and August 27 – 28

Starting at 9 a.m. and held rain or shine

Food, Drinks and Music

For more details, visit BicycleHeaven.org.



the eclectic and yet cohesively displayed collection of memorabilia that fills the museum, including a section of Elvis and Beatles memorabilia.

The museum seems to be drawing a following of neighborhood businesses as well. A music museum may soon be opening up next door and a company called Aero Tech Designs has settled into the neighborhood as well, offering clothing for cyclists that is made here in Pittsburgh and shipped worldwide.

Morrow says the sport of cycling also seems to be growing exponentially as well. And increasingly he has individuals who visit his store just wanting a simple bike to get on and ride, without all the fancy gears and mechanisms. If this sounds vaguely familiar, you may find just the bike you’re looking for at Bicycle Heaven. And if not — it’s definitely an enjoyable ride down memory lane.

For more information visit BicycleHeaven.org. ■