



Inspired by the joy and mobility his son, Jacob, receives with his custom bike, Hal Honeyman specializes in creating mobility for those with special needs. *Photos by Sarah Rivers*

WHEELS OF HOPE

By JAMI KUNZER

Hal Honeyman's focused on the one he hasn't helped yet.

As the creator of bikes that allow mobility for anyone, no matter their disability, Honeyman has given thousands of disabled children and adults the freedom and independence they thought they had lost.

But ask him the story that sticks with him, and he'll talk about the 24-year-old veteran who hasn't been able to ride a bike again. The veteran lost all four limbs in Afghanistan.

Honeyman, of St. Charles, went to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., to help the veteran. He spent much of a day working with him and his physical therapist to get him on a bike.

"We weren't successful," he says.

But Honeyman's going back and will keep going back until that veteran is riding a bike.

"I know he's going to be successful,"

Honeyman says.

It's that determination that has likely gotten Honeyman where he is today. That and the inspiration and support of his family.

Honeyman's a nationally recognized, award-winning "hero," despite the fact he would

rather not be called one. He's just lucky, he says.

"All these kids and adults are all unique with their own situations and life stories," he says. "Every one is just sort of an amazing story. To be part of it, that's pretty neat."

Honeyman says things just kind of "happened one after another" to get him where he is today. He bought The Bike Rack in St. Charles roughly 35 years ago. Working part time at the shop back then, he was going to school to be an architect.

When the shop, rather tiny at the time, came up for sale, he and a coworker sat down at his parents' house.

"We didn't have a plan of what we were doing and where we were going," Honeyman remembers. "We just knew we had a passion for bikes."

Honeyman, along with his family, still runs the business, but it has evolved into so much more.

"There's really nobody out there doing what we do," says Tammy Simmons, Hal's sister.

Simmons serves as executive director of Project Mobility, a nonprofit group that grew out of Honeyman's modified-bicycle business, called Creative Mobility. Honeyman started the business after he realized his son Jacob, who was born premature with cerebral palsy and can't walk, couldn't ride a typical bike like his siblings.

Now 17, Jacob was 3 years old when his dad bought him a bike with an upright seat and harness and pedal straps and adapted it to fit his proportions. Jacob could then ride like the other kids.

From then on, Honeyman set out to help other people.

"Someone like my son Jacob, he has got a lot of physical challenges . . . When I see how happy he is in spite of all that, I look at him and don't consider myself a hero," Honeyman says. "I look at what he's doing. He gets up every day



Custom fitting is an integral part of Hal Honeyman's Creative Mobility, which specializes in finding the right equipment solution for any specific needs.

with a smile, and that teaches me a lot.”

In 1997, Honeyman expanded The Bike Rack to sell the specialty bikes and customize them for his customers’ needs.

“We really work with everyone from first-time cyclists to elite athletes,” he says. “Every day is different. You never know who you’re going to meet, what you’re going to expect. It’s never boring.”

Through Project Mobility, started in 2004, donations are raised so some of the roughly \$3,000 to \$5,000 bikes can be donated. The group also hosts bike-fitting clinics and camps nationwide.

Honeyman and his Creative Mobility business work with the Wounded Warrior Project’s Soldier Ride as well. Honeyman attends the eight rides that span the country every year and tailors each bike for the needs of each soldier.

“He’s amazing,” Simmons says of her brother. “He puts out there for everybody before himself. He has changed the lives of thousands of kids and adults.”

One of those kids is Janna Blowers, 15, who was surprised with a bike while attending a rally being filmed when Honeyman won a “Hallmark Hero” award in 2008.

A segment on Honeyman and the award, hosted by Regis Philbin, appeared on the Hallmark channel and can be viewed on the Bike Rack’s Web site at www.thebikerack.com.

Janna and her mother, Betsy, of St. Charles, went to the rally at the suggestion of a friend whose daughter had gotten a bike from Honeyman.

Janna has Moebius syndrome, a neurological condition that impacts her strength and balance.

“We must have gone through three sets of training wheels,” Betsy Blowers says of the family’s efforts to keep Janna on a bike. “As you get bigger, you can’t do it anymore. We just sort of gave it up, and she got involved in other activities.”

Blowers heard of Honeyman’s bikes, but couldn’t afford one.

“It was in the back of my mind that some day (we would try to get one),” she says.

The day of the rally, Janna sat on the modified bike and took off. Now she wants to go for a bike ride as soon as the weather turns nice, her mother says.

“She can do it,” Blowers says. “She can do what the other kids do now.”

Inspired by the way Honeyman and the bike helped his sister, Janna’s 18-year-old brother, Eric, and some classmates at Judson

College in Elgin decided to raise money for the cause as part of a project for their “Faith

adaptive bike that was donated to the multi-needs class at Mill Creek Elementary School in Geneva, where Blowers works as the physical therapist. The six children in the class now use the bike at recess, to ride indoors and as part of therapy, Blowers says.

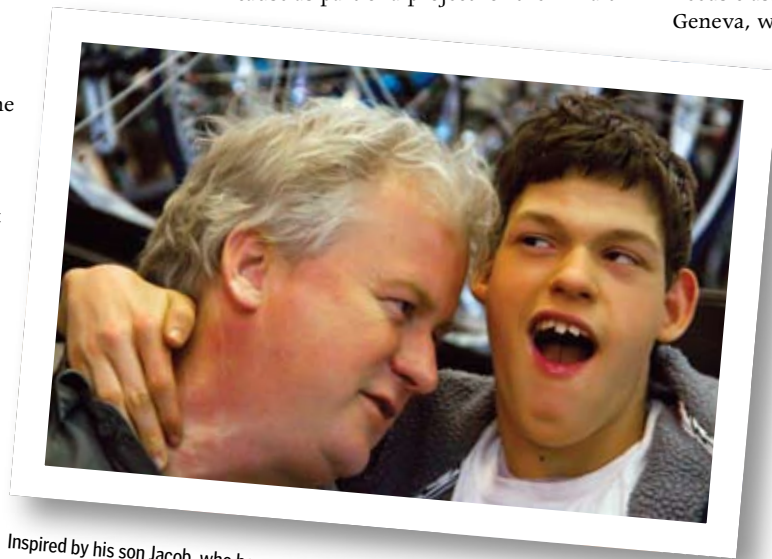
“It’s amazing,” she says. “They can push the pedals and make it go. To see them sitting in a wheelchair, you might not believe that it’s possible.”

The fundraising fell a little bit short of the amount needed to buy the bike, but Honeyman made it happen regardless, Blowers says.

“Because they’ve lived it and seen the difference it makes in lives, they just have big hearts for these kids,” she says.

For more information on Hal Honeyman and his family, as well as The Bike Rack (at 2930 Campton Hills Road in St. Charles), go to www.thebikerack.com or call 800-711-BIKE (2453). Information on Creative

Mobility and Project Mobility can be found at www.creativemobility.net and www.projectmobility.org. To learn more about the Versa Trike Honeyman developed, go to www.versatrike.com.



Inspired by his son Jacob, who has cerebral palsy and cannot walk, Hal Honeyman specializes in bikes for disabled riders, customizing them for his customers’ unique needs.

and Learning” class. They created a video and hosted a “bike rally,” allowing the kids to ride the adaptive bikes.

They raised about \$2,000 toward buying an

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