

Denver second-graders get new wheels thanks to Gates annual bike “BuildORama”

Company teams up with Wish for Wheels to deliver 63 bikes to Castro Elementary School



Andy Cross, The Denver Post

Castro Elementary 2nd grader, Carlos Villela rides his brand new bike with a little help from Ellen Huang, Gates director of environmental affairs, during a bike giveaway event in the lunchroom at Castro Elementary in Denver on Dec. 17, 2020. Gates and Wish for Wheels partnered together for the fourth annual giveaway, third at Castro Elementary, to deliver 63 Priority, Gates Carbon Drive belt, 3-speed bicycles to all second-graders at Castro Elementary.

By **JUDITH KOHLER** | jkohler@denverpost.com | The Denver Post
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Not only did Carlos Villela, Daniella Soira and Noah Avli get brand new bikes Friday, they got to take them for several spins inside the school lunchroom.

The three were among the first of the second-graders at Castro Elementary School in west Denver to get their bicycles and helmets as part of the Gates Corp.'s fourth annual bicycle giveaway. The Denver-based company teams up with Priority Bicycles, a manufacturer, and Wish for Wheels, which distributes about 7,000 bikes a year to

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second-graders.

The first students to get their new wheels were among just a handful at school for a class. They raced around the lunchroom, cleared of most of the tables and chairs, to get used to using the brakes and gears.

The rest of the second-graders were expected to pick up their bikes after finishing their online classes at home.

"I can't tell you what a blessing it is for our community," said Robert Villarreal, Castro Elementary principal.

The principal said the excitement among the students and the neighborhood is high when Gates and Wish for Wheels show up with the shiny new bikes.

Gates usually holds its bike "BuildORama" in the summer and makes the delivery right before school. Gates employees and their families spend a couple of days assembling the bikes. But the pandemic nearly put the brakes on the project this year.

"We talked about canceling the event this year because it was hard to get bikes, one, and we weren't quite sure how we were going to make it work, getting the employees together, given all the social distancing requirements," said Tom Pitstick, Gates' chief marketing officer and a senior vice president.

But the timing was good, Pitstick said, because Gates could give the students the bikes. There's been a run on bicycles during the pandemic as outdoor recreation surged.



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Castro Elementary 2nd grader, Daniela Soria rides her brand new bike down a hallway, back to her class after a bike giveaway event in the lunchroom at Castro Elementary in Denver on Dec. 17, 2020.

Gates spokeswoman Ani Vattano said the employees built the bikes in a furniture store warehouse that had plenty of room to spread out. About 30 teams assembled 63 bikes for Castro Elementary and another 50 for Wish for Wheels.

The bikes use Gates' carbon-belt technology instead of a chain. The belt lasts longer and doesn't require maintenance, said Aaron Schicker, one of the employees who helped with the delivery.

Wish for Wheels, based in Denver, gives bikes to second-graders in low-income areas. Founder Brad Appel said his organization works with schools to track the impacts the bikes have. He said schools have noticed that attendance and behavior improve.

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