



AN ASSOCIATION
FOR THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY
OF THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS

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Pleins Rayons in Motion



Most cyclists set out on a trip with a plan but the creators of Pleins rayons/ Freewheeling— a bike building enterprise located in Cowansville, for autistic, intellectually challenged, and at-risk school students and young adults — have been riding into the unknown for the last year and a bit.

Michael Herman, a local philanthropist well known in school circles, had the means to make a difference with the closing of a local bicycle factory.

Stephane Marcoux, a pro-cyclist, bike shop owner, and recreational therapist had the opportunity to make a difference when he teamed up with Michael and his board of directors.

Together, this team along with Myriam de Coussergues, the assistant director, of Pleins Rayons, have been on a wild adventure since the programs' incorporation in December 2015.

Pleins Rayons started out with twenty or so participants a year ago, and now boasts a clientele pushing ninety persons. Individuals on the autism spectrum, living with an intellectual disability, or at-risk of school dropout, rebuild bicycles and give them free of charge to the community through schools or other benevolent organizations.

This recycling of goodwill, positive energy and bicycles earned Pleins Rayons the distinction of being the best non-profit for handicapped individuals in the entire province of Quebec in ten short months. This prize is awarded by the Office des personnes handicapées every two years and was accompanied by a \$10,000 cheque.

Riding the wave of community support, in terms of large donations of bicycles, wood, tools, and financial contributions, Pleins Rayons is determined to see this project through to success.

While it is an innovative and much-needed initiative in Brome-Missisquoi, it remains extremely costly to operate. Last year's operating budget was \$145,000 and it left Pleins Rayons with a shortfall of \$20,000 and an interest-free loan of \$50,000 according to the treasurer's report given at their first AGM on March 16.

These needs have pushed Pleins Rayons to open several social economy projects: a bike shop, a birdhouse building project (thanks to the Pacte Rurale), a metal sorting project, a floor sorting project, a canteen, and job training at the Orpailleur vineyard.

As president Michael Herman commented, "We are using every avenue open to us to clear a path for an underserved segment of society one bike at a time."

Pleins Rayons is seeking government funding as well as charitable status so that it can benefit from potentially large donations. Currently, the initiative receives donations through Townshippers' Foundation. Follow the action on Facebook and those wishing to donate should send money earmarked for Pleins Rayons to Townshippers Foundation, 100-257 Queen St., Sherbrooke, QC J1M 1K7. Secure donations may also be made online at www.TownshippersFoundation.ca.

For more information on Townshippers' Association and our activities, keep reading this weekly Keeping in Touch column in The Record and visit us on Twitter @Townshippers, Facebook.com/Townshippers, and our website www.Townshippers.org. Connect with Townshippers' offices in Sherbrooke at 100 – 257 Queen, 819-566-5717, toll-free: 1-866-566-5717, or Lac-Brome at 3-584 Knowlton Rd, 450-242-4421, toll-free 1-877-242-4421.

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