

OUR TOWN



Joe's Garage. Mobile Bicycle Repair. Prince's Island Park

PHOTOGRAPHED BY **RANDY GIBSON**

five-hundred kilograms of gear. Six flat tires. Seven brake adjustments. Three tune-ups. Such is an average day in the life of Joe Nunn—mechanic, philosopher, altruist, al fresco bike fixer-upper.

Three mornings a week, the former Torontonians pulls a tool box the size of a washing machine on a tricked-out tricycle from his house in Sunnyside to a patch of grass on the east side of the LRT pedestrian bridge at Prince's Island Park. There he spends an hour (two if it's raining) setting up his temporary bike shop: erect massive tent, reconfigure the workbench, hang shelves, unpack tools, put up sign. It's been his routine for the past two summers, which Nunn stretches into September.

Then, he waits. Inevitably, a late-for-a-meeting commuter stops for a speedy oil job. Or a tourist on a rented cruiser swings by to put some air in his tires or, more often than not, a regular stops in to borrow an Allen key and shoot the breeze. Once, says Nunn, a dazed fellow wandered over and started inflating his own shoes. "I told him my pump wasn't compatible with his style of footwear," says Nunn, a laid-back former bicycle courier who works as a ski tech in winter. "Anyway, the guy seemed to think it worked."

All in all, Joe's Garage (named after Frank Zappa's 1979 mini-rock opera) is a busy but relaxed place where customers who know how to use the tools are encouraged to help themselves, free of charge. Nunn gives courtesy tutorials on adjusting one's own brakes and derailleurs, and offers a sliding pay scale for students who need repairs—all policies that make you wonder how the guy makes a living under his riverside tent. "It's not completely unselfish. I think it's good for my business to see more and more people riding."

In its view of cycling as recreation rather than transportation, Calgary lags behind Toronto, despite our enviably extensive pathway system, Nunn says. "I try to get people thinking about using a bike rather than their car every day."

In return for his services, Nunn not only has legions of loyal two-wheeled customers coming to him for tune-ups and major overhauls, he also gets an education in human behaviour. "I deal with millionaire CEOs from the condos nearby, and I deal with the homeless guy who needs some repairs." What he's learned is that, well, people are the same wherever you go. Bikes, he says, are the great equalizer. "Everybody has one. It's just more or less important to them." **S**