



THE RAIN HAS CLEARED. THE WORKSHOP IS NOW OPEN AND HUMMING WITH ENERGY. KIDS EXCITEDLY CLAMOR ABOUT, TOOLS CLANKING. BIKES ARE ON RACKS GETTING WORKED ON. INNER TUBES AND TIRES RESIDE IN A CORNER.

We're inside Bearings Bike Shop in Adair Park, a neighborhood in southwest Atlanta nestled beside elevated MARTA tracks. This area saw one of the highest foreclosure rates in the city of Atlanta when the giant real estate bubble burst.

It was around that time that Becky and Tim O'Mara, founders of the bike shop, relocated here. Wanting to move from the suburbs into the city, they saw an affordable, "great little neighborhood, really diverse," Becky says. "We loved the houses and the community that was here, so we bought a house and started renovating." It was 2008. Bikes were nowhere on their mind.

With their new home just across the street from a neighborhood park, what they got was a front-row seat to life in Adair Park, unvarnished. "We'd sit on our porch and watch teenagers get high in the gazebo and little kids fight, like little kids get into fist fights with each other," Becky says. "It was just crazy to watch. So we kind of realized, 'Oh, okay, that's what's going on here.'

"When we moved into the area, we wrestled through it a lot. We just had never known that

there was this poverty that existed in our city, so close to us," she says. "We were living in the suburbs and were used to driving past these neighborhoods to get on a plane and go on a mission trip somewhere else."

THE NEW NEIGHBORS || Trash used to line these streets. That was before the O'Maras became more and more enmeshed in the community. As fights unfolded between little ones, Becky and Tim would grab their dog and go for a walk, "you know, to try and distract" and break up fights, explains Becky. They slowly got to know the kids, their names. The kids learned theirs.

Soon, thanks to one outgoing girl named Britney, the idea for the bike shop was born. She came by their house looking for glue to complete a homework project. The O'Maras helped out and started a friendship. One day, they realized that Britney, one of the few kids in the neighborhood who had a bike, hadn't been riding hers lately. The tires were busted, so they struck a deal. Britney agreed to do some chores around the O'Maras' house to earn the cost of the replacement parts and, in exchange, they would buy them for her and work with her to fix up her bike. A new bike turned out to be ►

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Volunteer Taylor Vaughan works with Tremain Gary, 11; Jquare Smith, 16, tightens a handlebar stem; Becky O'Mara says bikes give kids independence; refurbished bikes await new owners — either kids who will earn them or people who come by the shop looking to buy.