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Theft of bikes hits home

Thieves who stole 10-speed bike worth just a few dollars from a tree at a rural Halton Hills home last week took something priceless away from the Vetro family.

Fifty-two-year-old Vince Vetro has been placing bikes of all types in a willow tree on the front lawn of his home on 15 Sideroad for the past few months to bring attention to his upcoming Pedaling Against Poverty fundraising bike ride, in which he'll cycle 500 km across Nicaragua in November.

The Independent & Free Press published an article Sept. 4 on Vetro's adventure and The Lending Journey charitable organization he founded that provides modest loans to women in impoverished countries.

The next morning, when Vetro planned to hop on his racing bike for a few hours of training on area roads he discovered that the decades-old blue Pacer 10 speed (pictured) and his wife Ramon's expensive grey Norco bicycle had been stolen. Vetro's bike was actually mounted on an eight-foot-high tree stump a few feet away from the willow tree, which held literally dozens of bikes, with the culprits taking only Ramona's, which was worth approximately \$1,500.

But there's immeasurable sentimental value in the 10 speed that Vince's mother had bought for him for Christmas when he was a 16-year-old— his first two-wheeler— at a time

when the household budget was stretched just to keep the eight Vetro brothers fed and clothed.

"That bike is really the inspiration for how the whole Lending Journey thing got started," said Vetro, while at the organization's fundraising golf tournament in Hornby on Friday.

"What my mother had to go through and sacrifice to get that bike for me, there's a correlation between what she did and what the women of The Lending Journey do for their families to pay those loans back. It would really mean a lot to get the bikes back somehow. I'm hoping these guys realized the bike wasn't worth much and threw it in a field or some bushes."

Vetro had also left a ladder nearby to make the thieves' work easier, but they still had to pry away metal spikes used to fasten the bikes to both trees. A collection box for Pedaling Against Poverty toonie donations was also vandalized and an unknown amount of cash taken.

"It wasn't enough to take the bikes, but they had to take money for charity too," he added.

"People are constantly stopping at the side of the road to take pictures with the bike tree or drop off old bikes and it didn't occur to me that someone would try to steal them."

Anyone with information about the theft is asked to call Vetro at 289-890-0418.



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