

Custom bicycle wheel manufacturing a vanishing art

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By:

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What: Custom bicycle wheels

Company: Cyclic Evolution

Address: 100 Cherokee Blvd., Suite 327

Website: www.cyclicevolution.com

Telephone: 463-0802

Owner: Merlyn Townley

What's special: Cyclic Evolution's handmade wheels are constructed over a much longer period of time, last longer and have a greater attention to detail than machined wheels that come with most bikes, Townley said. "Those are fine for most people, but they are not for everyone," he said.

The origin story: Townley said he began working summers in a bike shop while in high school and through college, when he first was instructed in wheel building. "Back when I started, building wheels was part of being a mechanic," Townley said. "It's become a bit of a lost art. I thought that initially it was pretty dumb, but now I make a living like that."

How long does it take to make? 45-90 minutes per wheel, depending on how many spokes are called for.

Where it's sold: Through orders made through local bike shops as well as at Hub Endurance (23 N. Market St.).

How long has he been making them? Cyclic Evolution was founded November 2009.

Expansions planned: "I'd like to keep the business in Chattanooga, and I'd like to keep the whole business under one roof, if I can," Townley said, adding that he's working to secure wheel-building contracts with several distributors and manufacturers.

Lessons of the trade: "If somebody was going to open their own business, I would say, 'Be patient and be flexible,'" Townley said. "I've been open for a year, and I think my business has become a lot simpler in the last year. Being flexible with it and letting it evolve is the most important thing about starting and owning a business."

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